The Dissertation Committee for Hsiu-Chen Lin
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Perspectives on communication from Teachers and Chinese American Families of Exceptional Students

Committee:

Shernaz B. Garcia, Supervisor

Elizabeth Keating

Millicent Kushner

Audrey McCray

James Schaller

Perspectives on Communication from Teachers and Chinese American Families of Exceptional Students

by

Hsiu-Chen Lin, B.S., M.S.

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Dedication

To my parents and husband.

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Perspectives on Communication from Teachers and Chinese American Families of Exceptional Students

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Hsiu-Chen Lin, Ph.D.
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Supervisor: Shernaz B. García

The purpose of this study was to explore home-school communication from the perspectives of parents of exceptional Chinese American students and teachers involved in the special education process. This naturalistic inquiry was conducted in one suburban school district in the southwestern United States. Over 10 months, four parents and six teachers participated in a series of interviews designed to capture their perspectives about their interactions with each other, including their challenges and successes; and their expectations regarding effective communication related to family participation in the special education process. Other sources of data included observations of parent-teacher conferences and Individualized Education Program meetings, field notes, and email exchanges between teachers and parents.

Analysis procedures were guided by the axioms and methods of naturalistic inquiry. Major findings revealed that dissonance rather than

congruence dominated the participants' encounters, particularly in terms of assumptions, expectations, and interpretations. Conflicts further served as the principal motivator for parent-teacher communication. Although parents and teachers identified unity for student success as a major outcome of successful communication, each group defined success in different terms. Parents believed that interactions with teachers promoted the development of personal relationships, which, in turn, facilitated positive school outcomes for their children. In contrast, teachers highlighted the positive outcomes of students' achievements or behaviors as the evidence of successful parent-teacher communication. Components of effective intercultural parent-teacher communication identified by participants were discussed. The emerging themes and working hypotheses suggested that well-meaning clashes resulting from cultural and linguistic discontinuities characterized interactions between the parents and teachers in this study. Additionally, inadequate cultural knowledge and lack of intercultural communication skills further hindered the attainment of successful parent-teacher interactions. Implications of the study findings for practice and recommendations for future research are offered.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication in school settings has been intensified by increasing numbers of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds and the low proportion of teachers from similar if not the same cultural contexts. Almost ninety-one percent of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools in 1998-99 were European Americans while CLD students made of 37.5% of all student population (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2000). NCES data also indicated that there was less than one percent of teachers were Asian/Pacific Islanders while Asian/Pacific Islanders represented 4% of the total student population. Wald (1996) noted that these demographic disparities are also prevalent in special education (SED). As a result of rapid changes in the student population, one major challenge that teachers experience is the recurrent interactions with CLD students and their parents who might be limited-English-proficient (LEP).

The promotion of parental involvement in their children's schooling process is expected in general education (GED) as well as mandated for students in SED both of which lead to more frequent home-school communication (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, 1997; National Education Goals Panel, 1994). Consequently, well-meaning clashes without both interacting

parties' awareness and realization (Brislin, 2000), miscommunication, misinterpretation, and conflicts might be present due to differences in cultures and communicative practices, with adverse effects on the collaborative relationships needed to effectively meet the needs of CLD students and their families.

The goal of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 and the 1997 amendments is to ensure that parental rights are respected concerning their children's SED. Parental participation in conferences regarding their children's evaluation, placement, and development of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is also mandated. The shift in parental roles from service recipients to decision-makers in their children's SED services represents an effort to provide appropriate educational services to students and their families within their cultural context (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). As advocated by some researchers, only through culturally responsive school practices can students from varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds experience equal educational opportunities (Chang, Lai, & Shimizu, 1999; Garcia & Dominguez, 1997; Harry, Grenot-Scheyer, Smith-Lewis, Park, Xin, & Schwartz, 1995).

Limited empirical research has focused on the interactions between language minority parents and teachers who are from different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Besides, the few studies which have been conducted have mainly centered upon either Hispanic American parents (e.g., Bennett, 1988;

Harry, 1992; Klimes-Dougard, Lopez, Nelson, & Adelman, 1992) or African American parents (e.g., Harry, 1995). Only one study was identified that explored the perceptions and difficulties of LEP Chinese American parents of young children with developmental disabilities when encountering English-speaking service providers (Smith & Ryan, 1987). Additionally, intercultural communication conflicts between Asian American parents and non-Asian American teachers emerged as a theme in Poon-McBrayer's (1996) dissertation research concerning service delivery to Asian American students with learning disabilities.

Consequently, perspectives of Asian American parents of exceptional students and teachers about their communications and interactions remain either unclear or unknown to researchers and practitioners. Thus, there is a compelling need to explore and understand the intercultural communication process, such as challenges and successes, expectations for effective communication, and mutual interpretations of transmitted messages, to successfully promote positive and meaningful home-school relationships. Successful communication between families and teachers is essential if services provided to exceptional students are to be effective, and students are to have opportunities to fully utilize their learning potential. Thus, the focus of this study is to capture teachers and parents' perspectives on their interactions with each other.

Demographic Profiles of Asian Americans

In this study, the term "Asian American" refers to individuals who originated from any Asian country contained in these four major regions: (a) East Asia, such as China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan; (b) the Pacific Islands; (c) Southeast Asia, such as Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos; and (d) South Asia, such as India and Pakistan (Pang, 1990). Since the U.S. census uses the same ethnic category for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Asian/Pacific Islanders (A/PI) will be used as an interchangeable term with Asian Americans. However, the term "Asian Americans" contains a variety of national, cultural, linguistic, and religious heritages, which should be recognized (Cheng & Chang, 1995). This usage also reflects the limitation of available literature addressing specific Asian subgroups.

Shifting Demographics of Asian Americans

Asian Americans doubled their population between 1980 and 1990. In 2000, A/PIs accounted 4.1% of the total population in the U.S. There is an estimated growth of 400% for Asian Americans within thirty years (Cheng & Chang, 1995). Most current projections estimate a rise of Asian Americans to 4.6% by the year 2005 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000). Since 1990, the percentage of A/PI has increased by about 0.1% of the total U.S. population per year. Immigration accounted for about 86% of this growth. Demographers further

predict that, by 2050 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1998), they will constitute almost 8.7% of the total U.S. population and foreign-born A/PIs will consist 59.6% of the total Asian American population. The U.S. Census of 1998 showed that A/PIs and Hispanic populations are expected to be the two fastest growing population as a result of their continuing immigration flux and high birth rates.

U.S.-Born and Foreign-Born Chinese Americans and Asian Americans

The Chinese community, as the largest ethnic group, constitutes 24% of all Asian Americans, followed by Filipinos (21%), Asian Indians (13%), Vietnamese (11%), Japanese (10%), and Korean (10%) (Lee, 1998). However, the above statistics cited by Lee as well as research conducted with Chinese Americans generally fail to recognize the Chinese as a heterogeneous group whose countries of origin include China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan.

Foreign-born Asian Americans comprise more than 60% of the Asian American population (Chan, 1998; Lee, 1998); the percentage of immigrants is much higher for some Asian countries. For example, as of 1990, 69% of Chinese Americans, 75% of Korean Americans, and more than 80% of Southeast Asian Americans were immigrants from their countries of origin (Rong & Preissle, 1997). Among these foreign-born Chinese Americans, 57% of them entered the U.S. after 1980 (Lee, 1998). Furthermore, these immigrants were from non-

English-speaking countries whose cultural norms and educational systems are different from those of the U.S. Moreover, upon entering the U.S., they may speak limited-to-no English, or learn English as their second or even third language, while their children may be born and raised in the U.S. and speak proficient English.

Two implications can be deduced from these demographic shifts. First, immigrants from Asian countries might experience different acculturation and socialization processes from other U.S.-born Americans. They might be able to acquire English language proficiency but not or the same levels as native-speakers, and/or they may be unable to comprehend implicit discourse rules operated in their everyday social interactions with others such as teachers or colleagues (Cheng, 1996). Second, the immigration influx from certain Asian countries has diversified Asian American students into two groups with distinguished differences (Dao, 1991). One group is composed of high-achieving students who are mainly from East Asian countries of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan who fit the model minority stereotype. Many Southeast Asian immigrants, also known as refugee populations, comprise the other group, which includes a higher proportion of underachievers and/or students with special needs due to differences in their life experiences and associated refugee status.

Asian American Students in the Public Schools

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2000), in school year 1998-99, Asian/Pacific Islanders accounted for 4.0% of the total student population of public schools in U.S., an increase of 2.64% from 1975-76. They also constituted 10.62% of all students from CLD backgrounds in the same school year. Divergent from other CLD groups, Asian Americans as a group continue to be over-represented in gifted and talented (G/T) programs and under-represented in all categories served in SED under IDEA (Poon-McBrayer, 1998).

Language minority students or students who speak a native language other than English are estimated to account for 40% of the school-aged population by the year 2010 (Pipho, 1998). In 1994, the projected figure for LEP Asian/Pacific Islander students was 15.64% of total LEP students in K-12; even thus, they represented only 3.72% of the total student enrollments in the U.S. (Office of Civil Rights, 2001). They constituted 16.10% of all students who were enrolled in programs for LEP students from K-12 in 1993-94.

From the report of the Office of Civil Rights (2001), Asian American students' projected representations in categories of mental retardation, autism, other health impairments, and learning disabilities were 1.76%, 4.78%, 1.42%, and 2.44% respectively, out of all students served in each category in 1998-99. Though numbers of Asian Americans served in SED are still low comparing to

students from other racial groups, nonetheless, there seems to be a small but steady increase in enrollments for various categories under SED programs, such as mental retardation and specific learning disabilities (Poon-McBrayer, 1998).

From the report of the Office of Civil Rights (1997), the projected percentage for Asian American students in G/T programs was 5.90% in 1993-94. As stated by Poon-McBrayer (1998), the rate of growth for Asian American students placed in G/T programs has decreased than students from other racial groups even though they still had the highest percentage of students enrolled in G/T programs. Also, LEP Asian students are less likely to be identified as G/T (Cheng, Ima, & Labovitz, 1994).

The disproportion of Asian American students served in G/T programs and SED services might indicate the diversities within this group and the lack of appropriate services and identification procedures for those who might benefit from SED (Poon-McBrayer, 1998). The high rates of placement in G/T programs and the misperception of Asian Americans students as model minority appear to overshadow the difficulties experienced by some groups of Asian American students.

Because of the low count of CLD teachers and the vast growth of Asian immigrants as well as Asian students in the U.S. schools, there is an increased likelihood for non-Asian teachers to interact with Asian parents and students. In

addition to language proficiency, communication between parents and teachers is also influenced by differences in communicative patterns, cultural beliefs, academic and career expectations, views of disabilities, and values about child's education (Chan, 1986; Harry, 1992; Perez, 2000). These differences are likely to complicate and affect the outcome of parent-teacher communication if they create barriers to each group's understanding of exchanged information and perceptions of communication competence during encounters related to the SED process (e.g., prereferral meetings or IEP meetings).

Theoretical Framework for Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is defined by Gudykunst and Kim (1997) as "a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures" (p.19). Through this process, at least two people from different cultures transmit information (e.g., knowledge) through all means such as spoken languages, drawings, and facial expressions. The term itself does not necessarily reflect the level of effectiveness of the communication process; Lynch (1998) argued that speaking the same language does not necessarily lead to communication, which is a linguistically and culturally bound process.

Intercultural communication competence entails knowledge of cultural, social, and interpersonal rules for appropriateness and mastery of language use such as grammatical rules (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Communication

competence is determined from the interactions in which people engage (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997), and effectiveness is defined from the points of view of those involved in the interaction. These participants might include those who are conversation partners or speakers and listeners, and those who are observers. Effective intercultural communication involves at least two people from different cultural backgrounds engaged in the process of information exchange while the extent of misunderstanding is minimized to the least degree (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Gudykunst and Kim further argued that misunderstandings and conflicts would be less likely to occur if both parties share more similar beliefs and have greater knowledge about each other's linguistics and cultures.

In the following subsection, components identified for intercultural communication competence are described based on the model proposed by Gudykunst and Kim (1997) who expanded the integrative model of relational competence claimed by Spitzberg and Cupach (1984). Both models recognize the importance of conversation participants' personal characteristics that contribute to appropriate and effective communication from cultural and social perspectives. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) highlighted three personal components of perceived competence, which are motivation, knowledge, and skills. However, it is important to note that the standards and criteria utilized to judge communication competence vary across cultures.

Motivation

One's desire to communicate appropriately and effectively with others is defined as motivation (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). People are motivated by certain needs (e.g., gathering information) to interact with others. People are more willing to communicate with those whose behaviors are perceived as predictable. Parents of exceptional children, for example, often initiate contact with teachers when they have concerns about their children's performances in school. Teachers usually keep parents informed of related information through holding a parent-teacher conference and sending notes home. Limited-English-proficient Asian American parents tend to feel less confident and uncertain even to the extent of experiencing fear when communicating with teachers orally (Lee, 1995). In Lee's study, these parents preferred written communication, which they perceived as a non-interactive means of communication, to oral communication, which was associated with high level of unpredictability for these LEP parents.

Knowledge

Knowledge refers to one's awareness and understanding of how to communicate appropriately and effectively with others (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). The ability to provide alternative interpretations of other's behavior exemplifies one aspect of knowledge. In Blakely's (1983) research, when Southeast Asian parents failed to attend parent-teacher meetings, their absence

was interpreted by participating teachers as indifference to their children's education. The inability of teachers to interpret the absence from these parents' perspectives (e.g., their inability to understand and participate in meetings because English was used as the only language) suggests that these teachers may not have possessed adequate cultural awareness and knowledge. It also exemplified the complexities of collaborating with parents from diverse backgrounds.

Skills

According to Gudykunst and Kim (1997), skills refer to one's ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with others. One of the skills is the ability to adapt one's behavior in the communication process. For LEP Asian Americans, encountering analogy and slang, which are usually culturally-embedded, often cause confusion and lead to miscommunication (Lee, 1995). For example, everyday English such as "Would you please wait a minute?" and "You are welcome." rather than slang such as "Hang on a second." (Lee, 1995) and "You bet." would be less confusing and more effective when interacting with LEP Asian American parents, particularly for those who have limited exposure to informal English such as slang. Traditional Chinese American parents may also reluctant to disagree with teachers during face-to-face interactions in order to maintain harmonious relationships. However, they might feel more comfortable to

express their concerns or disagreement through sending a written notice to the teacher. This illustrates how Chinese American parents adopt an alternative channel to voice their disagreement.

The judgment of communication competence that is usually influenced by one's culture requires consideration of the perspectives from all involved participants. As the Asian population keeps growing, chances are high that all teachers will interact with Asian American students and families who may share neither cultural nor racial identities. Consequently, misunderstanding might occur as a result of cultural clashes and differences in schooling and socialization experiences.

Significance of the Problem

After the passage of IDEA, numerous studies focused on building collaborative relationships with language minority parents of exceptional students (Harry, 1992; Harry & Kalyanpur, 1994). However, research about family-school connections in SED for Asian Americans has received scant attention. Existing literature reflects finite information regarding the personal experiences of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences and intercultural interactions voiced by educators and Asian American families, respectively.

The absence of research in this area points to the need to explore and understand the communication process and the factors contributing to effective

intercultural communication from perspectives of Asian American parents of exceptional students and the teachers who serve them. Chinese Americans, the largest subgroup among Asian Americans, were chosen to explore their perspectives on their communication with teachers.

The Focus of Inquiry

The focus of this study is to understand the dynamics of interpersonal and intercultural interactions between teachers and parents of exceptional Chinese American students, especially among parents who speak Mandarin/Chinese or Taiwanese as their first language. Naturalistic inquiry was the research method utilized in this study to capture and understand the full range of perspectives of Chinese American parents and teachers regarding the complex nature of their encountering experiences. Both parents' and teachers' mutual perceptions of intercultural interactions were examined in the context of the nature of parenting at home; beliefs about education, disability, and SED; and teaching philosophy in the classroom.

Chinese American families included the primary caregivers of the students who have interactions with teachers through attending the IEP meetings and parent-teacher conferences. All students received SED services under IDEA. Teachers who were identified as the primary teachers and had the greatest contact with these Chinese American students and parents were invited to participate.

Data collection and analysis of this exploratory study were guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perspectives of teachers and families of exceptional Chinese American students about their interactions in parent-teacher conferences and/or IEP meetings, including challenges and successes?
2. What are the components of effective intercultural communication from the perspectives of teachers and families of exceptional Chinese American students?

Significance of the Inquiry

While literature has well-documented high-achieving Asian American students (e.g., Alva, 1993; Blair, 1998; Chao, 1994; Kim & Chun, 1994; Ogbu, 1995), Asian American students with special needs have been ignored by most researchers. The enrollment data from the Office of Civil Rights (1997) shows that Asian American students as a group are over-represented in the G/T program and under-represented in all categories of SED. This has further perpetuated the research emphasis on the success stories of Asian American students rather than those who are served in SED.

The percentage of recent Asian immigrants to the U.S. continues to increase. The number of LEP Asian American students and parents is rising and has become a matter of vital concern for educators. As mandated by IDEA,

parents are expected to play a more active and leading role in their children's SED process. The delivery of SED services to exceptional Asian American students cannot be considered successful unless their parents are meaningfully involved in the educational processes such as defining the learning goals in the students' IEP.

This preliminary research is intended to serve as a cornerstone for future research in collaboration with families of exceptional Chinese American students, with an emphasis on the dynamics of intercultural communication between parents and teachers. The findings of this study contribute to building the database of the parent-teacher communication for Chinese families of exceptional children. Furthermore, strategies and programs for forging partnerships with Chinese American parents and developing cultural competence in teachers through professional development are formulated after the dynamics of the interactions are fully understood. The present inquiry represents an effort to fill the research gap of the limited understanding of the perceptions of Chinese American families of students with special needs and teachers about their experiences of intercultural communication.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) has mandated that all parents of exceptional children regardless of ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds are entitled to be equal partners in their children's SED. Consequently, there is a greater likelihood that teachers will have intercultural interactions with Asian American parents who are gradually increasing their visibility over the last few decades. The purpose of this exploratory study was to explore and portray the intercultural communication process in the context of SED from the perspectives of Chinese American families of exceptional students and their teachers. Miscommunication between Chinese American families and school educators can undermine the mutual trust and rapport needed between them as well as the effectiveness of interactions. Therefore, a comprehensive review of Chinese Americans in areas including cultural values and styles of interacting is called.

The following section will provide a review of notable issues, which may arise in the interaction with Asian American families. Because of the limited focus on Chinese Americans, Asian Americans are used as references to provide their notions of factors related to cultures and communication. Furthermore, some

of the cited references are dated back to the ’80s, which also illustrate the research gap in this area.

Chinese American and Asian American Cultures and Communication

Intercultural communication difficulties might be rooted in differences of values, thought patterns, languages, and communication styles (Chan, 1998). These factors might contribute to the misperceptions of Asian American parents as quiet, compliant, or even non-participatory, which are believed by some researchers and the public (Yao, 1988). For Asian American parents, divergences of cultural values, English language proficiency, and communication styles and discourse rules can either facilitate or impede their intercultural communication with school teachers.

Cultural Values

Culture has great impacts on how people interact with each other. Asian countries of China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam are strongly influenced by the Confucian cultural model, which emphasizes the hierarchical relationships among people (Cheng, 1989). High power distance which focuses on the hierarchical relationships among certain people guides how people should interact with each other (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Matsuda, 1989). People in higher status, such as teachers who are perceived as authority figures, have greater power

over those who are in lower status, such as parents. As a result, Asian parents who defer to authority figures might feel uncomfortable and be reluctant to play active roles (e.g., decision-makers, advocates) in their children's education, which might be perceived as disrespectful to teachers' authority (Constantino, Cui, & Faltis, 1995; Dao, 1991; Shoho, 1992; Tran, 1992).

Regarding education ideology, Asian Americans value education but think about the responsibilities of parents and teachers quite differently from U.S. educators. Wu and Grant (1997) noted that a traditional Asian American family is prone to perceive the role of teachers as to teach within the school context (e.g., instructing reading skills) and the role of parents as to parent within the home context (e.g., supervising and monitoring study). Therefore, if parents consider their role as a supporter for the child's education within the home environment, they might not necessarily see the need to initiate contact with teachers. They might believe that parents are not supposed to interfere with school processes and view those teachers who seek parental involvement as incompetent (Huang, 1993). Furthermore, school personnel are expected to decide all school and educational matters without regard to parental concerns or desires in many Asian countries (Blakely, 1983; Chan, 1986). School personnel seldom contact parents unless their children have academic or behavioral problems in school. Consequently, Asian American parents might not regard talking with teachers as a

positive means of parent-teacher interaction. Moreover, they might not know how to involve themselves in their children's education like their counterparts from the U.S. mainstream cultures because of their lack of experience in school participation caused by different educational orientations in their native countries.

"Face-saving" need is a typical characteristic of collectivistic cultures in Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam (Cheng, 1989). As stated by Matsuda (1989), saving face is more concerned with "appearance than with substance" (p. 47). Positive differences of high academic and career achievements usually bring collective family pride while negative differences, such as disability and school drop-out, which will result in collective family shame are often concealed if possible (Chan, 1986; Matsuda, 1989). Therefore, Asian parents may not feel comfortable to discuss issues, such as academic and behavioral problems of their children or their own concerns, in public settings like IEP meetings, since they might have to take the risk of losing face. In addition, Asian Americans parents might need a longer time to accept the fact that their children are diagnosed as having a disability and need SED services.

Siu (1996) suggested that U.S.-born Chinese American parents, who had gone through the American educational system, were more confident than foreign-born Chinese American parents, who had limited-to-no educational

experiences both in the U.S. and in their country of origin, in aspects such as English proficiency and familiarities with the mainstream cultures and the operation of American schools. Chinese American parents who are born and raised in the U.S. are likely to see their roles in education as partners with schools, to involve as volunteers and policy-makers in schools, to initiate contact with school teachers, and to openly express their concerns and dissatisfactions to school personnel (Siu & Feldman, 1996). Consequently, Chinese American parents show considerable variability in their interactions with schools depending on their levels of acculturation.

Language Difference

Language is the most frequently identified barrier to parent-teacher communication by both Asian American parents and school teachers (e.g., Blakely, 1983; Constantino et al., 1995; Shoho, 1992; Siu, 1996; Siu & Feldman, 1996; Yao, 1988). When no translator is provided at parent-teacher meetings and documents are sent home in English only, LEP Asian American families are discouraged from home-school communication because of their lack of English comprehension. In Blakely's (1983) research, LEP parents from Korea, Japan, and Taiwan often attended parent-teacher meetings with self-accommodations such as the use of bilingual dictionaries and accompaniment of bilingual friends. However, without available resources to comprehend notices and messages sent

home and in parent-teacher meetings, some Chinese American parents and Southeast Asian parents were often absent from such direct face-to-face communication (Blakely, 1983; Constantino et al., 1995). Under the circumstances, the child who speaks English has to act as an interpreter for his/her parents or read school newsletters to his/her parents in their native languages to help them understand what is going on at school (Blakely, 1983).

The research conducted by Constantino and her colleagues (1995) showed that LEP Chinese American parents had higher attendance rates for parent-teacher meetings when accommodations were made, such as providing bilingual interpreters, sending home documents written in Chinese, and posting Chinese signs in school campus. Moreover, parents in the same study were more willing to initiate phone calls to teachers and participate in the educational process such as curriculum design when teachers were open to appreciating and learning about Chinese cultures and language. Limited-English-proficient Chinese American parents seemed to feel appreciated and welcomed to be partners with the school instead of feeling discouraged, ignored, and rejected by school when school provided accommodations for them.

Language difficulties can also hinder CLD parents from gaining knowledge and information to develop communication competence in their participation in their children's SED process (Boon, Wolfe, & Schaufler, 1999).

When parents are not informed of their legal rights and unfamiliar with the procedures for SED services, they are less likely to communicate effectively regarding their children's needs. Furthermore, they might sign all papers without meaningful participation in their children's SED process such as opportunities to express their concerns and needs or their inputs may not be valued or considered.

For LEP Asian parents, their limited comprehension of English is likely to adversely affect their involvement process. Smith and Ryan (1987) argued that difficulties of English comprehension and communication could add to LEP Chinese American parents' confusion and frustration when they were lacking knowledge and understanding of the U.S. medical and educational systems. Consequently, these parents were less likely to seek professional help and utilize services, which were available to them. For LEP Chinese American parents of children with developmental disabilities, it appeared that these parents' understanding of the diagnosis and the disability labels applied to their children was impeded by the fact that service providers could only speak English (Smith & Ryan, 1987). Smith and Ryan further emphasized that "the lack of language-appropriate and culture-appropriate information" (p. 350) regarding the attributes of the disabilities and intervention services appeared to have a negative impact on parents and children in the service delivery process.

Communication Styles and Discourse Rules

Asian cultures are viewed as high-context cultures, which value indirect communication styles (Chan, 1998; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Huang, 1993). In high-context cultural societies, most of the information is embedded in the physical context or internalized in the person who either receives or transmits messages. It does not require clear and explicit verbal expression but relies on presumptions based on verbal and nonverbal signals shared by people (Huang, 1993). Moreover, Asian Americans tend to use indirect styles of speech (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997) to avoid direct confrontation or embarrassment. As a result, Asian American parents who are used to communicate from high-context cultural perspectives might feel uneasy or offended and experience difficulties in school communication patterns, which stress direct and efficient manners.

Important patterns of verbal and nonverbal behaviors learned at home might be fairly different from the American teachers' expectations (Cheng, 1989). Repeated head-nodding and lack of eye contact are often exhibited in Asian Americans' body postures (Matsuda, 1989). In Chinese cultures, it is rude to say "no" in various contexts. Teachers have to be aware of the communicative meaning of the answer or response, since a "yes" may actually mean a "no" and "nodding one's head" may not necessarily indicate that she/he agrees (Cheng, 1989). Moreover, in American mainstream cultures, "silence" is generally

perceived as “no problem or O.K.”, whereas “silence” is a sign of respect in Chinese/Taiwanese cultures. As pointed out by Blakely (1983), when teachers invited Southeast Asian parents to the parent-teacher meeting over the phone, most parents replied “yes” but failed to attend. This often caused teachers confusion because they did not realize that “yes” did not necessarily mean “yes” in these parents’ situation. Explanation provided by these parents was that they wanted to avoid hurting teachers’ feelings and save face of both parties by saying “yes” even though they has decided not to attend the meeting.

Poon-McBrayer (1996) provided another example that one Asian mother felt rejected when the teacher kept telling her that she should call instead of going to school to meet with the teacher. The teacher’s behavior was interpreted as reluctance and unwillingness to talk with parents from the mother’s perspective even though the teacher’s intention was trying to save the mother’s time and travel to school since this Asian mother was working. The significance of such communicative differences and inconsistencies between Asian and mainstream U.S. cultures cannot be minimized. Misinterpretations of verbal and nonverbal expressions will occur when neither Asian American families nor teachers are aware of the mismatched hidden dimensions in communication.

Implicit discourse rules in Asian cultures. In most Asian cultures, there are many explicit and implicit discourse rules for children. Some examples of such

rules include: (a) do not stare at the person you are talking to; (b) speak only when spoken to; (c) be quiet and obedient in class (Cheng, 1989); and (d) children should listen rather than speak. Consequently, the socialization process of Asian American parents in communication might vary from those of Americans who are encouraged to express ideas, to ask questions, or even to challenge others' opinions (Dao, 1991). Therefore, even parents might have a hard time expressing, challenging, or disagreeing with others. Therefore, Asian American parents may have quite different communication styles from the teachers who practice American mainstream cultures.

Hidden discourse rules in American schools. Delpit (1988) addressed the unequal power distribution within the school context as "the culture of power" (p. 282). She argued that individuals needed to master certain rules or codes such as communicative strategies and linguistic forms in order to participate in the school conversation. The linguistic forms contain the use of appropriate language and English. For LEP Asian Americans, encountering analogy and slang which are usually culturally based often cause their confusion and lead to miscommunication (Lee, 1995). If Asian American parents neither speak proficient English nor understand slang or school language, they might feel more powerless in addition to their low-status roles as parents when compared to teachers who are perceived as authority figures.

The similar powerless positions of parents were also observed from other CLD groups. Even for a Hispanic mother who shares most of the U.S. middle class values and speaks proficient English has become silent and noninvolvement in her child's SED because of the power arrangement controlled by school educators (Bennett, 1988). These practices of unequal power arrangement was exercised through ways such as localizing problems within the individual and limiting and ignoring parent's voices in certain areas. Therefore, the silence of noninvolvement could prevent the building of connection between home and school, which might deprive the best educational process available to the exceptional student.

The school's hidden curriculum, addressed by Cheng (1994, 1996) and Chang, Lai, and Shimizu (1999) echoed Delpit's (1988) position that explicitly being told the discourse codes or rules can be helpful for an individual to gain power. Furthermore, language minority parents and students may experience difficulties in understanding school conversation because of their limited proficiency in English, different cognitive and social codes (Cheng, 1996), different styles of verbal and nonverbal communication, and unfamiliarity of educational jargons or technical terms. As a result, culture-related conflicts might occur when LEP Asian American parents and students have limited understanding of the hidden agenda operating within the American schools. Miscommunication

could be taking place when teachers have inappropriate assumptions about Asian American parents' knowledge and levels of English proficiency and acculturation.

Asian American parents viewed phone calls rather than written notices as a more appropriate means of informing them of the referral meeting in the IEP process of their children (Poon-McBrayer, 1996). However, many LEP Asian American parents in Lee's (1995) study reported that they preferred written communication mode to oral or face-to-face communication. These parents felt that they would have more resources, such as consulting dictionaries or discussing with spouse, to figure out what the written or printed documents meant. Lee further noted that they might feel impolite and powerless to ask for clarification or disagree with teachers' opinions, and to communicate in English, which is not their native language. These Asian American parents would request teachers to speak slowly even when an interpreter was present in parent-teacher conferences since the interpreter involved in these conferences was not a native English speaker either. One mother who knew very little English and did not have an interpreter in her meeting with her child's teacher, denoted that she was able to gain a general idea of her child's school performances by identifying three words, "good", "OK", and "bad", used by the teacher (Lee, 1995). It demonstrates the common difficulty for a meaningful parent-teacher communication when Asian American parents are LEP and teachers do not provide bilingual documents and

involve interpreters, particularly when qualified bilingual and bicultural interpreters are unavailable.

In spite of these challenges, teachers can utilize effective strategies to reach out to Asian families. For example, Davis (1989) recommended that making positive phone calls, and writing thank-you notes and letters of praise from teachers to parents could actually establish positive home-school connection, especially when the communication was translated with the help of bilingual speakers and writers. Davis stated that his school had a fixed response rate from parents of between 61% and 67%, when letters soliciting parents' views of school services were sent and parents were encouraged to write in their native language.

In addition to differences in cultural norms and styles of interacting, diverse perceptions of disability could also affect how Chinese American families interact with professionals such as school educators. An examination of Chinese American cultural explanations of disability is called for because they will influence parents' attitudes and participation in the processes of prereferral, identification, and placement for SED services.

Chinese American and Asian American Cultural Explanations of Disability

The unavailability of current literature and research focusing on Chinese Americans or Asian Americans has restated the compelling need to fill the gap in

this area of research. Moreover, Chinese Americans might hold fairly different perceptions of disability comparing to those of Chinese in their country of origin as a result of acculturation processes and medical and technological advances during the last two decades. From available literature, Asian Americans hold fairly different views of disability in addition to the stigma and shame attached to the label of a disability.

Disability as Punishment

Disability can be perceived as a punishment as a result of parents' or ancestors' misbehaviors or wrongdoings (Chan, 1976). For example, one Chinese father believed that his involvement in gambling and an extramarital affair during his wife's pregnancy had caused his child to suffer from cerebral palsy (Chan, 1978, as cited in Chan, 1986). Under some circumstances, this exceptional child could be seen as a curse to the whole family (Cheng, 1987). Cheng further explained that some Asian families feel it is their karma or fate to have a child with a disabling condition. Some Chinese Americans still believe their deeds from past lives have made God punish them by giving them an exceptional child (Lee, 1997).

Disability as a Result of Parents' Behavior

Some Chinese mothers of exceptional children have attributed their children's disabilities to their own behaviors during pregnancy (Chan, 1986; Cheng, 1987). Such behaviors include eating or non-eating certain type of food or engaging in certain physical activities (e.g., carrying heavy things). One Chinese mother reported that her job as a seamstress, which involved excessive use of scissors, has resulted in her daughter's split thumb (Chan, 1986). In Taiwan, both parents are often blamed for brush-painting the wall or using a hammer during pregnancy if their child was born with a marking on the face or with facial deformity. As stated by Lee (1982), Asian Americans believe both the imbalance of yin and yang caused by inappropriate diet and the bad circulation of chi energy inside human's body resulting from improper exercise can lead to disease and disability.

Disability Caused by Supernatural Powers

Another common belief held by Asian Americans is that the person with disability is usually perceived to be possessed by supernatural powers such as demons, ghosts, or evil spirits (Chan, 1986; Lee 1982). As a result, parents might seek help from monks, priests, or shamans who might perform chants and provide a lucky charm made from herb to be hang around the neck of this person with a disability (Chan, 1986). From personal experiences, in Taiwan, shamans usually

put a piece of folded paper which was written in God's language in a small red envelope tied by a red string to be put around the neck of the exceptional person.

Disability as a Gift from God

In contrast to the above perspectives is that having a child with developmental disabilities is regarded as a gift from God and could bring good fortune to the family (Miles, 1997, as cited in Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999).

Despite these different perspectives on the attribution of disability, Asian American parents might feel embarrassed or inadequate if they have a child who is experiencing learning difficulties or academic failures (Chan, 1986). Chan suggested that Asian American parents were more likely to view these difficulties or failures resulting from their children's laziness. For example, Chinese parents usually think of their children's poor academic performances as a result of laziness rather than disability-related factors such as learning disability, which is also a new concept for them (Chang, 1995). Consequently, they are less likely to request professional help and prefer to provide more practice and/or learning opportunities for their children while expecting their children to study harder and outgrow their learning difficulties, as they grow older.

Disability is viewed as the manifestation of the integration of mind, body, and spirit in most Asian cultures. Furthermore, diverse perceptions of causes of

disabilities might lead to different help-seeking behaviors which influence the way Asian American families respond to available services (Chan, 1986; Cheng, 1987) and professionals in addition to other limitations such as their limited-English-proficiency. Professionals such as special educators or psychologists in the U.S. have been trained to dichotomize problems into physical and psychological dimensions (Lee, 1997). Therefore, cultural explanations of disability held by both Asian American families and teachers of exceptional students might be manifested and/or verbalized in explicit and implicit ways during their interactions. Without the awareness of and sensitivity to cultural values exhibited in their interactions might be detrimental to the effectiveness of parent-teacher communication which in turn can limit the success of the exceptional student in academic and social areas.

Components of Effective Intercultural Communication

Motivation, knowledge, and skills are the three components contributing to effective communication (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). These three factors interact with the outcome of parent-teacher communication in the context of SED. As described in a prior section, parental involvement in their children's SED is mandated by law, which may motivate parents and teachers to have regular to frequent interactions. However, for some CLD parents, lack of knowledge about what is expected of their involvement may affect the parents' ability to be active

participants and informed advocates for their children's education. Miscommunications and misunderstandings may happen when parents and teachers do not possess adequate knowledge and skills to interact with each other. For example, teachers interpreted Southeast Asian parents' absences in parent-teacher conferences as indifference to their children's education, particularly since they had agreed to come during their phone conversation (Blakely, 1983). On the other hand, these parents tried to keep harmonious relationships with teachers without refusing their invitation. Furthermore, they did not feel the need to communicate with teachers if their child did not get into any trouble in school which is a traditional educational orientation held by Asian American parents (Blakely, 1983).

Therefore, motivation, knowledge, and skills are highly related in the context of parent-teacher communication. They could initiate and maintain the communication as well as discourage interactions.

Motivation

Turner (as cited in Gudykunst & Kim, 1997) suggests that our motivation to communicate with others is greatly impacted by personal needs, particularly when communicating with those who are unknown to us. Four constructs that are relevant to motivation competence are predictability, anxiety, self-conceptions, and approach-avoidance (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

Need for predictability. The level of predictability is positively correlated to one's desire to interact with others (Turner, as cited in Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). If one's words and behaviors are predictable to us, we are inclined to initiate and continue the interaction. Otherwise, we are reluctant to communicate with this person to get to know him/her better. For example, Asian American parents might be silent and non-responsive by following the communication rules guided by their cultural traditions. European American teachers might experience discomfort since the flow of communication seems to be off from their perspectives. One of the possible consequences is that European American teachers might lose their motivation to interact with Asian American parents.

Need to avoid diffuse anxiety. Most of the time, we will initiate communication to reduce our anxiety and nervousness we experience when the processes and results of the communication are unpredictable. During the process of collaboration, both teachers and parents will try to keep all modes of communication channel open (e.g., spoken and written formats) in order to decrease their anxious feelings. However, both too high and too low levels of anxiety can reduce our desire to communicate with others.

Need to sustain our self-conceptions. The desire to maintain our self-identities not only relates to our anxiety level but influences our communicative ability. Gudykunst and Kim (1997), for example, suggest that there might be

communication breakdown when people from individualistic culture, such as European American teachers, that places high values on personal identities interact with collectivists, such as Asian Americans, who stress their social identities. When both groups of people fail to gain support for their self-conceptions from each other, they are more likely to lose their motivation to maintain their interaction.

Approach–Avoidance tendencies. Most people experience the dilemma of simultaneously wanting to interact with strangers and avoiding the unfamiliar situation. Gudykunst and Kim (1997) state that most people prefer to interact with those who are similar to them. Consequently, Chinese American parents usually are highly involved in their own community including Chinese churches and Chinese language schools. At the same time, they are aware of the needs to maintain contacts with U.S. school educators that might lead to either anxiety or sense of self-concept as caring parents. The complexities of the combination of our needs to get away from anxious situation and to maintain self-identities can result in our approach-avoidance attitude toward people from other cultural group.

Knowledge

In addition to motivation, we need knowledge of how to perform in an appropriate and effective way to communicate with others. Four aspects are discussed under this section as suggested by Gudykunst and Kim (1997).

Knowledge of how to gather information. Information gathering strategies can be passive (e.g., observation), active (e.g., asking questions), or interactive (e.g., asking question and self-disclosure). Asian American parents, for example, can observe how other parents participate in their children's schooling, ask teachers what their expectations are regarding parental involvement, or share the educational orientations in their native countries and ask teachers to share the operation of U.S. educational systems. Through information collected from the other interacting party, one can decrease one's own level of anxiety when interacting with him/her and have more accurate interpretations and understandings of messages being transmitted.

Knowledge of group differences. Awareness and knowledge of group differences can facilitate successful communication (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). For example, Asian countries such as China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan are generally perceived as having high power distance culture (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Matsuda, 1989). When interacting with people from these countries, we have to be aware of the status of the interacting party in order to form personal relationships and to avoid or to minimize misunderstandings.

Knowledge of personal similarities. Recognition of similarities with others at the personal level is critical when developing friendships (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). One needs to be conscious of the differences and similarities between

oneself and people from other cultural group and avoids negatively stereotyping others to form good interpersonal relationships.

Knowledge of alternative interpretations. The ability to utilize diverse frames of reference to interpret other's behaviors is crucial to reduce misunderstandings. If we can be mindful of others' perspectives upon observing others' behaviors or receiving others' messages, conflicts or misunderstandings are less likely to occur. Using Blakely's (1983) study as an example, the European American teachers would not have explained Southeast Asian parents' absences in meetings as not caring about their children's education. Instead, they would have been able to consider alternative explanations such as, (a) it is rude to say no in Southeast Asian cultures, or (b) it is a new concept for them to attend parent-teacher conferences.

Skills

In this section, six practical skills to communicate competently with people from the other cultural group, which are necessary to lessen one's uncertainty and anxiety are discussed.

Ability to be mindful. Being mindful means being cognitively conscious of the communication process and open to new inputs and different interpretations (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Consequently, we are conscious of avoiding negatively stereotyping others' behaviors. Furthermore, constantly negotiating

meanings and asking for making repairs of what were said during the conversation can lead to better and effective communication.

Ability to tolerate ambiguity. The extent of our tolerance for ambiguity is positively related to our communication competence. People who are more tolerant of ambiguity are more likely to gather new and objective information about the situation and the other interacting party (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). As a result, they are less likely to have biased impressions of others and misinterpretations of what were communicated which can avoid ineffective and failed communication.

Ability to calm ourselves. As described before, we cannot communicate effectively if we have too high or too low level of anxiety. However, if we can manage to reduce the level of anxiety and avoid negative thought processes such as making overgeneralizations and blaming others or ourselves, we will gain better control of our thought and proceed communication in a more effective manner.

Ability to empathize. Empathy, which includes verbal and nonverbal behaviors, requires us to think and feel in another's position. By being empathic of what others are expressing verbally and nonverbally, we are able to maintain the communication flow.

Ability to adapt our behavior. The ability to adapt our behaviors when interacting with people from other cultural groups, such as speaking their language or behaving from their frame of culture, is critical in developing successful communication.

Ability to make accurate predictions and explanations. This skill requires one to make accurate predictions and explanations of others' behaviors and messages based on the aforementioned skills.

To communicate effectively and appropriately requires that we have motivation, knowledge, and skills. Motivated to approach and communicate with each other, and equipped with appropriate knowledge in cultures and communicative patterns, and practical skills can parent-teacher communication have the most effectiveness.

Summary

The literature review demonstrates the variances of cultural values, levels of English proficiency, and communication styles and discourse rules between teachers and Asian American families. Having a child with a disability which is perceived as a shame to the family (Chan, 1986) further confounds the intercultural encounters between teachers and families of exceptional Chinese American students. Successful home-school communication requires not only cultural sensitivity and knowledge but also practical skills from both sides.

However, limited research has focused on the intercultural interactions between teachers and families of exceptional Chinese American students in areas of their successes and challenges in their interactions, experiences in participation in their children's special educational process, and their expectations and perspectives of components for communication competence. The present inquiry study attempts to fill the research gap by focusing on Chinese Americans, the largest and growing subgroup within Asian Americans.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This naturalistic study explored and captured the perspectives on intercultural communication from teachers and families of three exceptional Chinese American students who were receiving SED services. Naturalistic inquiry, a qualitative method of research, was utilized to understand the complex nature of intercultural encounters. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the perspectives of teachers and families of exceptional Chinese American students about their interactions in parent-teacher conferences and/or IEP meetings, including challenges and successes?
2. What are the components of effective intercultural communication from the perspectives of teachers and families of exceptional Chinese American students?

Research Design

Naturalistic inquiry was chosen to guide this exploratory study because it is an appropriate approach to engage participants and learn their perspectives (Maxwell, 1996) in the exploration of their intercultural encounters. Naturalistic inquiry is also constructivist in that it can represent the participants'

viewpoints and respect their ownership of the data (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Moreover, this approach allowed me as a researcher to take the specific sociocultural values held by both parties into consideration while inquiring about their experiences of communicating with each other. Five unique features of naturalistic inquiry guide the inquiry strategy and the reporting of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

1. "The nature of reality: Realities are multiple, constructed and holistic" (p. 37). There is no single reality regarding intercultural communication between Chinese American families of exceptional students and teachers. For example, teachers might perceive a parent-teacher conference as successful while Chinese families of exceptional students might feel dissatisfied but be reluctant to speak out. Through in-depth interviews, I, as a researcher, was able to explore and understand how each person's perceptions were constructed and influenced by their own cultural values and socialization experiences.
2. "The relationship of knower to the known: Knower and known are interactive, inseparable" (p. 37). The participants and the researcher co-constructed data generated from the inquiry through the process of interviews and member checks. I constantly reflected to teachers or parents what I understood during interviews. They also had a chance to express and clarify in depth to help me better understand their perceptions and prevent any misunderstanding.

3. “The possibility of generalization: Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses are possible” (p. 37). Since there is no single reality in naturalistic approach, it is impossible to generalize the research findings to the entire population. For example, the length of time required for Chinese immigrants to become acculturated, including attaining English proficiency and acculturation after arriving in the U.S. varies accordingly. Therefore, the study results of these three Chinese American families do not represent all Chinese Americans in their own groups. Through thick descriptions of relevant contextual information, such as years of residence in the U.S., prior experiences of dealing with other schools and teachers, and the extent to which traditional Chinese cultural values are practiced at home, readers can generate their own working hypotheses and determine the transferability of these contexts or interactions.
4. “The possibility of causal linkages: All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects” (p. 37). Parents and teachers are constantly changing and reformulating their interpretations and perceptions. Therefore, it is impossible to infer causal relationships from their interactions.
5. “The role of values: Inquiry is value-bound” (p. 37). Naturalistic inquiry does not assume that people can be neutral from their personal subjectivity. Therefore, the interviewer must formulate a statement of Person as Instrument

before starting data collection. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) mentioned that the researcher is "the most significant instrument for data collection and analysis" (p. 39). Before data generation began, my Person as Instrument Statement (see Appendix A) documented my schooling and working experiences in Taiwan and in the U.S., beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations, and personal histories that were most likely to shape my study.

Participants

Through this research, I sought to understand perspectives on communication and to identify factors that had influenced the communication process between teachers and Chinese American families of students with exceptionalities. Therefore, two groups of participants were involved in the study: (a) the families of three Chinese American students receiving SED services, and (b) their general and special education teachers, representing those who had the most contact with parents and students.

Selection of Purposive Sample

Purposive sampling was used in this study with the goal of helping "to answer the basic research questions and fit the basic purpose of the study" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 83). Since I was particularly interested in Chinese American parents' participation in their children's education, the following selection criteria were developed and used to guide my selection of participants:

1. The families had at least one child who was receiving SED services in grades K-12. If available, students would be selected who had the same disability.
2. The family participants invited to participate, including parents and extended family members, were born in an Asian country (e.g., China, Taiwan, Vietnam), immigrated as the first generation of Chinese Americans either as U.S. citizens or permanent residents in the U.S., and spoke at least one of the following languages: Mandarin/Chinese, Taiwanese, or English. To the extent possible, the country of origin would be the same for all families. This criterion served two purposes. First, it allowed the interview to be conducted without an interpreter since I can speak these three aforementioned languages. Second, it assumed that parents might share moderately similar cultural and linguistic attributes among themselves while having fairly different cultural and linguistic backgrounds from the U.S. mainstream culture.
3. Participating family members received their K-9 education in their country of origin, which increased the likelihood that they would be less familiar with the U.S. elementary and secondary educational system, and that they had experienced a different socialization process through schooling. It also allowed me to better identify cultural factors in the communication process.

Following the selection of my family participants, I identified the general and special education teachers of their children to participate. Teachers were

invited if they were involved in these students' education, were either the primary teachers and had significant contacts with families. This criterion assured that teachers would have an adequate amount of interaction with participating Chinese American families to generate discussions during interviews.

Sample Generation

Beginning in November 2000, various strategies were employed to locate Chinese American parents of exceptional students. This task was expected to be difficult, given the low prevalence of disabilities for Asian American students and the fact that Chinese American students are a subgroup in this broader category. First, I contacted the directors of SED of two local school districts with the greatest likelihood of having more Asian American students. I requested information about campuses, which had served the most Asian American students with disabilities. However, this strategy turned out to be unsuccessful.

Second, I contacted one of the directors of a local parents support group and explained my study and the search for Chinese American families of exceptional students. Only one parent from Taiwan was willing to talk to me after this director had made some phone calls to check the ethnic backgrounds of Asian parents from the agency's database. This parent, Ms. Han (names have been changed to protect confidentiality of participants), not only agreed to participate in my study but also introduced me to two other Chinese families, both of whom

had a child with disabilities. One of these mothers, Julie, and her husband, Henry, were willing to participate after I provided them with information about my study. The second mother, Karen, happened to be a SED teaching assistant in Star Independent School District and was highly involved in one of the local Chinese churches. In spite of her efforts, no other Chinese family that met my criteria for purposive sample, was identified through her networks with schools and church.

Third, I had contacted local community resources including one Taiwanese and two Chinese churches, an Asian American Association, and local chapter of a Taiwan charity organization (Tzu Chi). Two available families did not want to participate while one family could not participate because their child was not receiving SED services in school.

It was not until mid-January 2001 that I invited Karen to participate in my study. Initially, I was concerned about Karen's educational background and her dual role as a parent and a teacher with respect to children with special needs. I ultimately included Karen as one of my four parent participants for the following two reasons. First, Karen and the other two participating families lived in the same school district. By having families from the same school district, I hoped to reduce the effects of school district factors, such as differences in district-wide policy that might overshadow the themes emerging from the data. Second, I might be able to uncover unique and shared experiences between Karen and the other

three parents in relation to their previous educational and knowledge backgrounds. The study was eventually conducted with these three families; four parents agreed to participate. Six participating teachers represented general and special education, elementary through high school. Their characteristics are summarized in Table 1. Profiles of participants are discussed in Chapter Four.

Table 1

Characteristics of Purposive Samples in February 2001

	Exceptional Chinese American Students		
	Brian	Tim	Terry
Grade	3	6	11
Disabilities	autism & language impairments	autism & language impairments	other health & language impairments
Placement	GED class	Self-contained SED class	Self-contained SED class

	Family Participants			
	Ms. Han	Julie	Henry	Karen
Years in the U.S.	16	10	13	21
Country of Origin	Taiwan	China	China	Taiwan
Years of Education in country of origin	16	16	16	16

	Teacher Participants					
	Ms. Lee	Ms. Gable	Ms. Brown	Ms. Morgan	Ms. Dee	Ms. Wade
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	White	White	White	White	White
Years in Teaching	5	14	5	6	1	21
Teaching Area	3rd SED	3rd GED	4th GED	SED	SED	SED

The research proposal was sent to the assistant superintendent and the director of the Special Education of Start Independent School District in Texas in late January 2001. The proposal included: (a) the purpose of the proposed study, (b) criteria for purposive sampling, (c) duration of study, (d) how and where the data would be generated, (e) consent forms for teachers and parents (including Mandarin/Chinese and English translations, see Appendix B, C, & D), and (f) interview guides for teachers and parents (See Appendix E & F). Following permission from school district to conduct my study, I received approval from the University's Human Subjects Committee, also known as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in February 2001.

Following the procedures suggested by the school district, I contacted the principals of the three schools regarding my proposed study and they introduced me to the primary teachers of the three identified exceptional Chinese American students. After a thorough explanation about my study, five teachers agreed to participate. A sixth teacher, the fourth-grade GED teacher of Ms. Han's son, was invited in late October of the same year, as discussed in a later section.

When meeting with parents or teachers, I explained the rationale for conducting this study and how their input could contribute to my understanding on the intercultural communication between Chinese American parents and teachers. I always made sure that they understood that I was interested in

understanding the nature of their interactions with each other rather than judging their adequacy or competency of their communication.

Data Generation

Numerous phone conversations prior to data collection had helped me to build rapport with family participants. In addition, rapport was further developed during the interview process as parents began to share their positive and negative experiences of interacting with teachers and schools. All interviews and other communications were conduced in the language chosen by the parent, so that they were in their comfort zone to express their perspectives during interviews. Rapport was established with the teacher participants when I approached them with explicit intentions to inquire about their perspectives on parent-teacher communication.

Sources of information included observations of parent-teacher interactions such as parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings, interviews, email exchanges between parents and teachers, and my field notes taken during the interviews and observations. The data collection in the field began in late February and was expected to last one semester. However, in late October, I received phone calls from both Ms. Han and Julie expressing their concerns about unexpected changes in their children's schooling situation. Consequently, Ms. Brown, who was the new fourth-grade GED teacher of Ms. Han's son, was

invited to participate in my study. I also resumed interviews with Julie, Henry, and Ms. Morgan and re-examined their perspectives on their communication when school had taken certain disciplinary procedures to deal with the student's escalated behavior problems.

Observations

Observations of the parent-teacher interactions in naturalistic settings such as parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings were included as another source of data to help me understand how participating teachers and families communicate and interact with each other. For Ms. Han's family, I had three opportunities to observe parent-teacher interactions. For Julie and Henry's family, I observed and videotaped three IEP meetings. I observed and audiotaped the annual IEP meeting of Karen's son.

These observations served as "probes for interviews" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 99) to clarify and gather the participants' interpretations and perceptions of their encounters during these meetings. Furthermore, I made sure that both teachers and families understood the purpose of using a video camera or tape recorder was to provide another source of data to help me understand their communication process. I would jot down major topics discussed during the IEP meetings and use them as a guide to conduct follow-up interview. From the follow-up interview with Ms. Morgan, for example, she identified the language

barrier as the reason why the parents kept asking questions about the related services provided to the student. However, the parents told me that they just wanted to find out what exactly their child was doing during these therapies.

Interviews

I used an emergent design by negotiating and co-constructing data with study participants and forming and testing working hypotheses throughout the interviewing process. I interviewed Ms. Wade in the library of Success High School and a nearby public library. The inquiry settings with the other five teachers took place in their classroom. I interviewed all parents at their homes except one of the interviews with Ms. Han, which was conducted at the middle school campus where the local Chinese Language School operated on Sundays. Only one parent, Henry, chose to use English as the interview language but gradually switched over to Mandarin/Chinese. The other three parents constantly code-switched between Mandarin/Chinese and English.

I continued to approach my study participants with my empathetic and open attitudes to establish rapport and trusting relations with them throughout the research period. As I interacted with parents and teachers, I made an effort to establish rapport with them by being a good listener. I genuinely solicited their thoughts and responses with no judgmental attitudes or remarks. Permission from participants to audiotape my interviews with them was obtained before I

conducted initial individual interviews. In this study, interview guide for parents and teachers were constructed around the research questions and included contextual information and potential probing questions to prompt the participants to voice, but not lead, their opinions.

The initial interview with all participants opened with the question "Generally speaking, how would you describe your communication and interaction with the teacher/parents?" If there had been a parent-teacher conference before the IEP meeting a few days ahead of my first interview with them, I opened with the inquiry "Tell me about the parent-teacher conference you just had." Gradually, their personal experiences of challenges and success in their parent-teacher communication and factors perceived as contributing to effective communication were revealed and verbalized.

During the first phase of data generation from February 21 to April 20, 2001, I interviewed each of the participants about their personal background information and their experiences with parent-teacher communication. I had the opportunities to observe one family's parent-teacher conference and three families' IEP meetings between March 26 and April 25. During the second data generation interval from April 15 to May 5, I conducted follow-up interviews as well as member checking sessions with participants separately. As stated in an aforementioned section, both Ms. Han and Julie contacted me about their

communication with the teachers, Ms. Morgan and Ms. Brown, regarding major changes in their children's education in mid-October. As a result, I included Ms. Brown as an additional teacher participant and began the third data generation stage from October 14 to December 11.

The interview sessions with participants ranged from two to six times, and lasted between 1.75 to 8.5 hours including the initial interview, member-checking sessions, and follow-up interviews after the observations. The number of interviews varied depending on when participants reached the period of data saturation when no new themes emerged (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Document Review

Relevant documents including email exchanges were examined to portray all facets of the complex communication processes between parents and teachers. Except Karen, who did not have regular written communication with the teachers, the other two families communicated with teachers by either sending emails or writing in the notebook on a regular basis. Email exchanges were attained from the teachers. During interviews, I would ask the participants about their comprehension and use of the delivered information through emails.

Field Notes

Transcribed interviews were supplemented by the use of field notes that I jotted down my reactions, impressions, thoughts, and feelings throughout observations and interviews either on the interview guide or in a notepad. Field notes served as another source of data to be utilized in data analysis (Sanjek, 1990).

Data Analysis

The interviews were the primary sources; other information served to provide the context for understanding the participants' experiences. Data analysis was based on the information gathered from observations, interviews, member checking sessions, paper-based feedback from participants, records of parent-teacher written communication, and field notes. Among these sources of data, the participants' interviews inevitably brought out the richest data to capture their perspectives and understanding of parent-teacher communication.

As is the case with naturalistic studies, data analysis process was conducted during data generation as "an ongoing process" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 111), with Gudykunst and Kim's theoretical model of intercultural communicative competence, which includes motivation, knowledge, and skills, serving as a guideline throughout the process. Data analysis procedures included

(a) coding data and categorizing data, (b) emerging themes, and (c) forming and testing working hypotheses.

Coding and Categorizing Data

Following each interview, I transcribed the tape and expanded the field notes from my memories and key words jotted down. Field notes and documents supplemented or contrasted what was expressed during interviews. Each verbatim transcript was chunked and coded with a few words or phrases that conveyed the same meaning as the chunked data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, both Ms. Han and Julie expressed their expectations of the teachers to provide more "homework" as a way to help the students master certain academic skills. The code such as "parents' expectations of teachers-homework (PExT-HW)" was assigned to represent parents' expectations of more homework. All units of data with the same code were read through respectively until the category title for every stack of data with the same coding was developed (Erlandson et al., 1993). This step was repeated for all units of data gathered from different sources. For example, parents' other expectations of teachers, such as developing the IEP based on the student's needs and assisting students in catching up with their nondisabled peers, were all placed under the broader category of "parents' expectations of teachers." The results of data analysis were then recorded on the computer using Excel worksheets

to present a broader picture of salient issues voiced by the participants during the inquiry process and to provide an audit trail for readers.

Emerging Themes

After the establishment of categories, category titles were examined for themes, based upon my background in the research topic and latent theory deducted from these data (Erlandson et al., 1993). For example, theme such as "mismatched expectations" emerged from categories such as "parents' expectations of teachers," "parents' expectations of students," and "teachers' expectations of students." Some themes were shared among the three cases of parent-teacher communication while others emerged uniquely from the descriptions of each participant.

Developing and Testing Working Hypotheses

Through the above approach, working hypotheses about the intercultural communication between Chinese American families of exceptional students and teachers were formed from collected data. For example, "For these teachers and parents, preconceived assumptions about communication, mismatched expectations, and culture-bound communicative behaviors created challenges in parent-teacher communication. " was developed as a working hypothesis for this study. This working hypothesis was tested against the collected data, by

conducting member checks with involved participants and by having discussions with peer debriefers (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Translating the Data

My interviews with the four parents were conducted either entirely in English, or primarily in Mandarin/Chinese with some English, reflecting the participants' language choices. All interviews were transcribed in the language(s) of each interview. Although no interviews were conducted in Taiwanese, Karen and Ms. Han used a few expressions in Taiwanese, which does not have a formal written language. I therefore translated these expressions into Mandarin/Chinese and made notes on the transcripts.

English was chosen as the language for the process of data analysis such as assigning codes and labeling emergent themes based on three rationales. First, I had no prior experiences in coding data in Mandarin/Chinese because both my training in research methodology courses and my previous experiences with data analysis were in English. Second, English has been the language in which I have built and expanded my knowledge base in SED and intercultural communication during my pursuit of the doctoral degree in the U.S. Third, the theoretical frameworks for this study were formulated in English. I also expected to reduce complexity by comparing and contrasting codes and themes from the transcriptions of teachers and parents in English rather than across two different

languages. Therefore, I felt I was more comfortable and competent in using English as my research language.

In the process of writing up the research findings, I translated the selected excerpts from transcripts into English as needed. The major consideration for the translation task was to maintain the original meanings rather than word-by-word translation. Furthermore, another doctoral student, who is bilingual in Mandarin/Chinese and English, reviewed the chosen quotes in order to validate my translations. In addition, I also asked parents to verify that English translations represented their original thoughts in Mandarin/Chinese.

Establishment of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness represents methodological adequacy. It is built upon the use of techniques that provide truth values through credibility, suitability through transferability, consistency through dependability, and neutrality through confirmability in naturalistic inquiry (Erlandson et al, 1993). The approaches used to ensure adequacy in establishing the trustworthiness of this study are described below.

Credibility

In a naturalistic inquiry study, there is no single objective reality but "constructed realities that exist in the mind of the inquiry's respondents with those

that are attributed to them" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 30). The relationship between my presentation of the findings of the participants' views and the true views of the participant was called credibility. Strategies utilized to ensure credibility included triangulation of different sources of data, peer debriefing, member checking, and keeping a reflexive journal.

Triangulation. The data generation period in this study consisted of three intervals over 10 months. Data obtained from statements of multiple informants including teachers and Chinese American parents were checked against observations of meetings between them and records of written communication. The triangulation of different sources of data provided related information about the same event or interactions and supported my insights about parent-teacher communication and relationships.

Peer-Debriefing. Peer-debriefing meetings with three doctoral students were held on a weekly basis during the first and second period of data generation during Spring 2001 and resumed at the beginning of the Fall 2001 semester. Three new debriefers including two doctoral students and my dissertation supervisor joined our meetings in October 2001 through the end of the Spring 2002 semester. As a group, my peer debriefers were knowledgeable about cultural diversity issues in SED, naturalistic inquiry research methodology, and intercultural communication; one doctoral student was bilingual in Mandarin/Chinese, and

bicultural in Chinese and the U.S. mainstream cultures. They not only provided insightful feedback but also questioned and challenged me to reconsider what was happening and what stories were emerging from my data. Furthermore, four of them also read the case studies and helped me communicate more clearly and thoroughly. Through peer-debriefing discussions, I constantly modified my analysis. Thus, credibility was also built upon these peer-debriefing sessions (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Member checking. Member checks were carried out by providing participants data in oral and written formats with the purpose of verification and clarification of my understanding, interpretations, and conclusions. It took place recurrently throughout interviews and when participants' were asked to read and respond to the reports of their case analysis. A few changes were made to ensure that I had clearly represented their perspectives in my report. Consequently, credibility was achieved through the co-constructing process in understanding how participants viewed their parent-teacher communication.

Reflexive journal. I kept a reflexive journal to record any information or thoughts regarding the study on a routine basis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In my reflexive journal, I chronicled my thoughts, doubts, and decisions along with the progress of my study, such as logistics, probing questions, observations, interviews, and processes of unitizing data, and naming categories and emergent

themes. Reactions and learning from related readings and peer-debriefing discussions that provoked thoughts on my study were also recorded.

Transferability

The transferability of the study's findings is based upon the reader's judgment (Erlandson et al., 1993). As the researcher and author, I selected my purposive sample, made every endeavor to provide sufficiently rich and thick descriptions, and kept my reflexive journal to help readers determine the transferability of my results. These procedures are expected to allow the reader to compare across settings and decide the applicability of my study findings to other situations.

Dependability

Dependability is accomplished if readers are able to get the same or similar findings when they replicate the study with the same or similar participants in the same or similar settings (Erlandson et al., 1993). Techniques such as the use of reflexive journal and field notes were used as documentation for an audit trail to establish the dependability of my study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is accomplished when the conclusions drawn by the researcher are drawn from the generated data rather than the researcher's biases

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I made sure that my data analysis and research findings were grounded in my generated data through member checks and peer-debriefing meetings. In addition, reflexive journal and audit trail materials of transcripts, field notes, and data analysis sheets were also documented for purpose of confirmability.

Establishment of Authenticity

Authenticity represents an effort to counteract the perception that there is a single objective reality. Naturalistic inquirers recognize that there are multiple realities perceived across different participant. Therefore, to make sure that each participant has equal say in the interview process and in the final research report. Five aspects of authenticity are discussed: (a) fairness, (b) ontological authenticity, (c) educative authenticity, (d) catalytic authenticity, and (e) tactical authenticity.

Fairness can be achieved when all participants in the study have equal say and access in the research process (Erlandson et al., 1993). I made sure both Chinese American families and the teachers had comparable say and access to the process of generating data. Also, each participant received a copy of a cover letter at the beginning of the study to help them understand their rights to agree to participate in, or to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from the study at any time during the research process. All participants were provided a copy of their

own case study and had at least one week to review it. Furthermore, I solicited their feedback and opinions whether their case study voiced their perspectives with respect to parent-teacher communication.

Ontological authenticity is achieved when participants experience the world around them in a new way (Erlandson et al., 1993). Through interviews, only one participant, Ms. Morgan, demonstrated her new understanding of what happened during her communications with the parents. Ms. Morgan came to the realization of her dilemma of communicating with Julie and Henry during our second interview:

> I don't want them [Julie and Henry] to think, 'Why does she [Ms. Morgan] keep explaining this to us? We get it.' So that has been the biggest thing this year. I just do not want them to think that I think any less of them because sometimes there is a language barrier. And so maybe I just assume they're understanding so that I don't have to go into that place runs over-explaining something. That, probably talking to you now, I kind of sum down what the problem has been this year. Makes me feel good. That's where I'm [in terms of my communication with them].

Educative authenticity refers to the understanding of, and appreciation for the construction of reality held by the other party while catalytic authenticity is achieved when participants utilize their understanding of the other party to guide their behaviors and decisions (Erlandson et al., 1993). Tactical authenticity is accomplished when participants feel empowered to take actions and make changes (Erlandson et al., 1993). In our second interview, Ms. Morgan demonstrated these three types of authenticity.

> I mentioned this in other [first] interview that sometimes I don't get response from them [Julie and Henry]. So I'm assuming that they are understanding what I am saying. I got a little better actually. After the last interview, I'm asking more direct questions from them so I get more answers. You know, putting the question mark, and 'Can you let me know what?' And [I got] some more [responses] back. After I talked to you, I thought, why don't I just ask more questions? I am doing that now.

Ethical Considerations

In addition to getting approval from the IRB to proceed with this study, pseudonyms were used to protect students, parents, and teachers. The rationale to address these four parents in different ways is discussed in the following chapter. Furthermore, in order to protect the students, I remained careful not to disclose the precise nature of the research site such as geographical information and names of the three involved schools and the school district.

I had faced the ethical dilemma about my role as a researcher and an advocate for the exceptional students. A phone call from Julie on October 25, 2001 put me in a dilemma whether I should remain silent under the circumstance that the school was about to make a major change in her son's placement as a result of his behavioral problems. Julie told me that Ms. Morgan called her and delivered the news that Tim, Julie's son, was about to be "out of school for thirty days" due to an escalation of his problem behaviors. Feeling shocked as well as concerned about the news, Julie was unsure if the disciplinary procedure adopted by the school was appropriate for Tim who is a special needs student.

Furthermore, Julie felt pressured to find the needed and accurate information within one week since the school had scheduled an IEP meeting on October 31. Consequently, she had contacted me in the hope that I could provide her with the information or resources related to discipline procedures for students with disabilities so she and her husband could save time on their internet research.

During my decision-making process, I consulted opinions from two people who had better knowledge about the appropriate procedures. One was a faculty member from my department and the other was one of my peer-debriefers who is an experienced SED teacher. On behalf of ensuring the student's educational rights, I decided to provide the family with phone numbers of two local parent advocacy agencies and the website address which had the complete information about Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In addition to discussions with my dissertation supervisor and all my peer-debriefers, I also sought the advice of a committee member as well as a faulty member who taught the research method course, Naturalistic Inquiry, to adequately address methodological and ethical concerns. All records of email exchanges and phone conversations about this incident were documented. The rationale for my decision-making process as well as my feelings and reactions was recorded in the reflexive journal.

I had the parents that I could not be their advocate during the IEP meeting but that I was willing to provide any information as requested by them. In the

email, I said:

> I am very happy to provide any information or resources, which might be helpful to you. However, I have to remain "neutral" in [during] the process of my data collection. That means I cannot be your advocate in the IEP meeting. I will do what I did when I attended the IEP meeting in April of this year. Just observe what happened in the IEP meeting.

Henry responded my email by stating:

> You've done exactly what we have been looking for: providing information and/or resource of information. We have never expected or wanted you to act on our behalf. I think we have had mutual understanding from the very beginning.

Summary

This study was conducted in a suburban school district in Texas. Naturalistic inquiry was employed to capture perspectives on intercultural parent-teacher communication from six teachers and four Chinese American parents. All parents, came from either China or Taiwan, spoke both Mandarin/Chinese and English, and had their K-16 education in their country of origin. Five teachers were European Americans while one teacher emigrated from Taiwan to U.S. at the age of three and received all her formal education in the U.S. The period for data generation lasted 10 months. The numbers of interviews for each participant ranged from two to six times. The duration of total interviews lasted from 1.75 to 8.5 hours. Different sources of data including observations, interviews, and email exchanges were gathered and analyzed to identify components of effective

interactions from both groups of participants. Three stages of data analysis, which were coding, emerging themes, and developing and testing working hypotheses, were utilized continuously and concurrently as suggested in the naturalistic paradigm. Strategies to establish trustworthiness and authenticity were incorporated throughout the research process.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE PHENOMENA

The naturalistic inquirer needs to "communicate a setting with its complex interrelationships and multiple realities" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 163) to readers in a way that facilitates and brings about the readers' understandings of the focus and results of the study. Needless to say, teachers' and parents' prior experiences related to home-school communication were expected to greatly influence how they currently represented themselves as teachers and parents. It further had an effect on how they communicated with each other, which was the scope of this study.

As I inquired parents' perspectives on their communication with current teachers, they consistently and constantly poured out their prior experiences and histories with other schools and teachers. It was evident that these prior experiences heavily influenced their current perspectives. Since I did not have access to teachers from previous schools, these data represented only one side of the communication process. This information provided the context for understanding parents' reactions, views, and behaviors. However, teachers in my study did not share similar experiences due to their limited interactions with Chinese or Asian parents. Consequently, I do not have teachers' life histories in this chapter, which focuses on background information gathered about the

participants. This provides a context for understanding the parent-teacher interactions. Chapter Five presents teachers' and parents' perspectives on their communication based on shared events that happened during the research period, which are the results of current study.

Profiles of the Participants

Participating teachers and parents of the three identified Chinese American students receiving SED services in the Star Independent School District shared their views on their communication with each other. The majority of topics centered upon each student's academic progress, social behaviors, and areas of concern about the student. Descriptions of each student's disabilities, characteristics, school histories, and current placement as mentioned by parents and teachers furnished a more complete picture of parent-teacher communication. Overviews of each family's composition, immigration history, and parents' education background and professions as well as summaries of each teacher's role in the student's educational process, and teaching credentials and experiences are provided.

Brian's Family

Ms. Han addressed herself by her Chinese name. She had two sons who were in seventh-grade and fourth-grade respectively. Brian, the second child, was identified as having autism when he was about three. Both Ms. Han and her

husband received bachelor's degrees from the most prestigious university in Taiwan, their country of origin, and came to U.S. to pursue graduate studies in Pennsylvania, in 1984 and 1985 respectively. Ms. Han's husband had a Ph.D. in a computer-related field and worked for a local high tech company. She had obtained her master's degree in pharmacy and was currently working on her doctoral degree through a distance education program. Her family moved from New York to Texas in 1993. The family chose this school district because it had a reputation for high academic achievement.

Ms. Han was in her late 30s and worked as a pharmacist in a local hospital. Although Ms. Han was willing to participate in my study, she had made it clear to me that she was extremely busy because her job required her to work in three shifts. In addition, she needed to take her elder son to attend numerous extracurricular activities and her younger son, Brian, to receive speech therapy three times a week. In addition, Brian went to a tutor for homework assistance for 1.5 hours on a daily basis. Her husband was unavailable for interview. Ms. Han told me that her husband did not like to discuss Brian's disability and was less involved in his educational process.

Brian was in the third grade at Peace Elementary School when my study started in February 2001. Before I conducted my study, I had spoken with Ms. Han over the phone several times. It was natural for us to converse in

Chinese/Mandarin over the phone. We chatted on topics, such as my study and Brian's strong interests in matchbox cars, and went over some of Brian's work samples during our first face-to-face encounter. Ms. Han chose to speak English when we started the interview after I explained the process of transcribing the tape to written documents. I became aware of changes in Ms. Han's nonverbal behaviors in our interactions such as decreased eye contact, once we switched from conversing in Chinese/Mandarin to English. Consequently, I made an effort to speak Chinese/Mandarin during our second interview, after which we spoke Chinese/Mandarin for all subsequent interviews.

Brian began demonstrating language regression and poor eye contact around two years old. He was diagnosed as having autism and language impairments, which qualified him for SED services. He was an eleven-year-old student at Peace Elementary School. Brian only spoke English. There was a consensus between Ms. Han and his teachers that having a sense of "humor" appeared to be Brian's most prominent characteristic. Compared to other students his age, Brain was much more well-behaved and less likely to interact and initiate conversation with others. He had a short attention span but responded well to verbal redirection. He also demonstrated perseveration behaviors, such as repeating questions about the changes of routine in class and at home and insisting on talking off-topic, as is often a characteristic of people with autism.

Additionally, Brian was reportedly good at math facts and calculation because of his good memory, another trait of autism. However, he had difficulty solving word problems and comprehending abstract concepts due to his inability to generalize, analyze, and think in abstract terms.

For Brian's parents, the most negative experience of interacting with school took place at Brian's former school where he attended the early childhood SED program from ages three to six. This school turned down their request to let Brian attend the kindergarten class at their home school, Peace Elementary. The former school insisted that Brian be transferred to another school, which was further away from Brian's home. Brian's parents invited advocates from the local parent support group to attend the IEP meeting. During this meeting, a mutually agreed upon decision was made for Brian to stay at the original school and repeat one more year of the early childhood SED program. Brian attended Peace Elementary for the following year. In his first year at Peace, Brian was placed in the special kindergarten class, which was established for him and another student with special needs because of the strong advocacy by the parents of this student. Brian had been attending the GED class with a full-time teaching assistant and SED services since he was in first grade.

During the research period, Brian advanced from third to fourth grade. The SED services provided to him included speech therapy for an hour a week,

inclusion math class, and appropriate skill and knowledge (ASK) class. In the ASK class, Brian received social support by joining a "playgroup," which was designed to help him and the other four exceptional students develop appropriate social skills by inviting nondisabled students to join the group during lunchtime, for 30 minutes, three days a week. In addition, Brian came to the ASK class for academic support for one hour and 45 minutes on a daily basis. After advancing to the fourth-grade class, the duration of time for academic support was reduced to an hour a day.

Brian's Teachers

Three of Brian's teachers participated in the study. Ms. Lee was the SED teacher, and Ms. Gable and Ms. Brown were the GED teachers.

Ms. Lee, in her late 20s, immigrated with her parents to the U.S. when she was three. Ms. Lee was a second generation Taiwanese American and had received all of her formal education in the U.S. However, at the age of four, her parents sent her back to Taiwan to attend preschool and kindergarten for three years in the hope that Ms. Lee would preserve her Chinese language proficiency. She came back to U.S. when she was six to begin elementary school. Ms. Lee held a bachelor's and a master's degree in SED and was currently working on her doctoral degree in SED at a local university.

Ms. Lee was Brian's ASK teacher in the second semester of his third grade. She not only organized and facilitated the operation of the playgroup, but also re-taught Brian the major learning points from his GED class and inclusion math class. The first four years of her teaching, Ms. Lee mainly taught low-income students. For four years, she primarily worked with African American and Hispanic populations. However, Brian was her first Chinese American student. Her stay at Peace Elementary School was her first year of teaching predominately White students in a wealthy suburban school district. Ms. Lee left her teaching position at the end of the spring 2001 semester.

Ms. Gable, Brian's third-grade GED classroom teacher, was forty-two years old. She had begun coursework for a teaching certificate in SED, but found it too "overwhelming" after she had completed a certain number of hours in a local state school for children and adults with severe disabilities as a requirement for one of her courses. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in GED with reading certification from a local university. Before working with Brian, she had taught another student with autism who had been included in her class for two years. Ms. Gable had attended one workshop about children with autism and legal issues for children with disabilities after she found out that Brian was going to be in her class.

Ms. Gable had been teaching for 14 years and this was her eighth year of teaching at Peace Elementary, she had taught approximate six Asian American students whose parents were from Asian countries such as India, Japan, Pakistan, and Taiwan. She had also taught Brian's elder brother when he was in first grade. Because one of her maternal grandparents was Lebanese, Ms. Gable felt her family background had influenced her to "have an appreciation for families like Brian or some of the other students" she had.

Ms. Brown was Brian's fourth-grade teacher. She was a twenty-seven-year-old White teacher with cerebral palsy. According to Ms. Brown, her own disability had inspired her to pursue SED. She had a bachelor's degree in SED and taught resource reading for three years in a " very poor, very low socioeconomic school" where the majority of students were African American. She and her husband moved from another big city to this district in Texas after they were married. Originally, she applied for the SED position at the "autistic unit" at Peace Elementary. The principal offered her the position to teach fourth grade GED when she expressed her concerns about her own physical limitations and the lack of experience in working with students with autism.

This was her second year of teaching GED at Peace Elementary. She thought her background in SED might have influenced the principal's decision to place Brian in her class. Before teaching Brian, Ms. Brown had no previous

experience of working with students with autism. During the first interview, Ms. Brown talked about her learning process to be a GED teacher. She mentioned that having more students in her class was "the main difference" between general and special education. Furthermore, she felt "more involved as a teacher" because she was with her 21 students all day long compared to working with different groups of six students every hour. She was also involved in planning for all subjects, making "the connection" with students, and working with other fourth-grade teachers as a team. She mentioned that she had "never really felt a part of the team" in her previous school because there were only two SED teachers and there was no collaboration between general and special education teachers. She told me that she enjoyed teaching in GED classroom and had no intention to leave the field even though she was currently working on her master's degree in counseling.

Tim's Family

Tim's parents, Julie and Henry, addressed themselves by American names. They had a thirteen-year-old son, who had autism, and a daughter in the second grade. They both obtained their bachelor's degrees in China, their country of origin.

As a first generation immigrant, Henry told me that he "just grabbed whatever chance he could" to come to U.S. In 1988, he came here to attend

graduate school in Arizona and graduated with a master's degree in computer science. Currently, he was as a computer software programmer in a local high tech company. Henry was the only parent who requested English to be the interview language. He provided two reasons for his choice of language. First, he told me that he did not know me until I contacted him and his wife about their participation in my study. Consequently, he thought that "there's no such thing [no reason]" for us to converse in Chinese, which was a social language for Henry to speak with his friends. Second, Henry thought topic such as the one addressed in my study "were usually addressed in English." However, our conversation language gradually progressed from English only to English and Chinese/Mandarin.

In 1991, after Henry had settled down, Julie and Tim came from China to reunite with Henry in Arizona. Julie was in her late 30s and worked part-time in a bank. According to Julie, Tim's disability was the major reason for her to continue working part-time. In fact, she decided to withdrawal from graduate school in Arizona so she could spend more time working with Tim. Because of Henry's new job at the local high tech company, the family moved to Texas in 1999. Because of their negative experiences with Tim's first elementary school in Arizona, Henry and Julie had spent a few months searching and visiting schools before they bought a house in this district. They chose this school district because

of its reputation for good education and plenty of resources. When Tim moved up to second grade, Julie and Henry had an IEP meeting with more than 10 professionals from the home school and the district. During the meeting, they felt that these professionals, including an interpreter, were "forcing" them to transfer Tim to another special school. Julie and Henry disagreed with the school's proposal after finding out that school was for students with severe disabilities; which they believed that Tim would not benefit from that type of classroom. Tim attended his home school for one more year before the family moved to another district in the same state.

Tim was in his first year in Hope Middle School when I started my study. Julie told me that she was more involved in assisting Tim's younger sister in academics and extracurricular activities since his sister had started elementary school, while Henry tutored Tim in math and reading at home.

Tim was identified as having autism and language impairments, which qualified him to receive SED services in Hope Middle School. He spoke Mandarin/Chinese and English, and to some extent, he understood Shanghai dialect spoken by his parents. Tim had a good memory for people and he enjoyed being around people. For example, Tim would hug and kiss family friends who came to visit. Furthermore, he often physically squeezed himself among a group of students in the cafeteria but he did not join their conversation. Compared to his

peers without disabilities, Tim did not have any friends and was unable to initiate or carry on conversation with others. Ms. Morgan, Tim's SED teacher, thought Tim had numerous behavioral problems such as becoming agitated and anxious easily, being impulsive, breaking rules consistently, and not following directions. Henry attributed one third of Tim's behavior problems to his being a teenager. For example, Tim would not "obey" and often did things that were "opposite" to what he was asked to do. Henry believed that Tim's disability explained two thirds of his problems, which he had no control over himself. Henry thought Tim was more easily frustrated than his peers and his "lack of verbal ability to express himself" aggravated his frustration.

Tim was very interested in prime numbers and letters. Henry told me that Tim could count out prime numbers up to 30, 000 and even had the capability to generate a list of prime numbers by running a Java program. However, he had difficulty solving word problems or applying his math skills in real life situation, such as making change. According to Ms. Morgan, Tim knew homonyms and liked to make up his own words by "misspelling things to quiz himself" even though his reading comprehension was at first grade level.

Currently, Tim was placed in Ms. Morgan's ASK classroom, which adopted a functional curriculum. Before the IEP meeting in November 2001, Tim was in choir class for inclusion even though he seldom participated in singing

with other students. He also attended adaptive physical education class. He had speech therapy lasting 84 minutes per week. During cooking class, the occupational therapist came in as a consultant to help Tim and other students measure ingredients and follow directions in recipes. However, after the IEP meeting in November, Tim attended school on a half-day schedule (11am to 3:45pm) and was isolated in a separate classroom, and later to a house while Ms. Morgan, a teaching assistant, or the district's homebound teacher provided him with individual instruction.

Tim's Teacher

Ms. Morgan was a 29-year-old European American SED teacher of six years. She received her bachelor's degree in SED and was working on her master's degree. Ms. Morgan said she always wanted to be a teacher and became interested in SED as a child when she saw "the special on television about Special Olympics." She was involved in Special Olympics when she was in high school and college. She had previously taught in a variety of SED settings, including inclusion, resource, content mastery, and life skill classes, one year in a multi-grade class mainly for children with attention deficient and hyperactive disorders in a private school, and one year at a private school for 18-to-21-year-old students with severe autism or mental retardation. Ms. Morgan taught inclusion math, science, and social studies at her first year at Hope Middle School, then moved to

the ASK program, which was a life skill class, the following year. Ms. Morgan told me that teaching the ASK program was her "interest" since she preferred to work with "kids [who] are more severely disabled."

Ms. Morgan had neither any training courses in cultural diversity nor any experiences of teaching Chinese American students. She said that she had "never really seen a lot of Chinese students with autism." She stated she had "very limited" understanding of the cultural background of Tim's family except reading from Tim's report that his family spoke "different dialects."

Terry's Family

Karen asked me to call her by her American name. Both her son and daughter were attending Success High School. Terry was the child who had disabilities. Both Karen and her husband were from Taiwan. Karen had a bachelor's degree in education from the most prestigious Normal University, which prepared preservice teachers. Her husband received a bachelor's degree from the most prestigious university in Taiwan. In 1980, Karen came to Texas with her husband, who obtained a master's degree in chemical engineering at a local university and currently worked in a managerial position at a local company. Karen later pursued her master's degree in early childhood SED at the same university when she found out her son, Terry, was diagnosed with static encephaledema, extra fluid in the fourth left ventricle of his brain. Karen was a

teacher at an early childhood intervention program before she worked as a teaching assistant in the district for five years.

Karen was highly involved in Terry's education but she reported that until Terry was in high school, her husband did not accept the fact that Terry could not learn and achieve academically like his peers without disabilities. When I asked if I could interview her husband, she discouraged me by asking me not to "open his wounds." Karen told me that she had tried everything to help Terry, including (a) putting Terry in mainstreamed (now referred to as inclusion) preschool program operated by a classmate at the local university; (b) hiring a tutor (now referred to as an in-home trainer) to come to her house and teach her how to work with Terry; and (c) requesting surgery be performed on Terry to correct his gait so he could walk "more like a normal person." Before moving to the local school district to work as a teacher and a teaching assistant, Karen worked in one of the local advocacy agencies that provided services to parents and their young exceptional children aged from birth to three. The interviews were primarily conducted in Chinese/Mandarin combined with a few slang expressions in Taiwanese. Karen often code-switched to English, however when she spoke of topics focusing on what parents and teachers could do to improve parent-teacher communication.

Terry was a 20-year-old student at Success High School. Terry was diagnosed as having static encephaledema at the age of 18 months. He had

symptoms similar to those of cerebral palsy because the extra fluid had influenced his motor development. In addition, he exhibited low cognitive ability, poor eye contact, and a short attention span. He was also easily distracted. Terry was classified as having other health impairments and language impairments, which made him eligible to receive SED services at school. According to Karen, Terry began to pick up Mandarin/Chinese when he was eight years old since Karen spoke either Mandarin/Chinese or Taiwanese with her husband. Terry spoke English and limited Mandarin/Chinese, and understood some Taiwanese.

Terry was a shy and well-behaved young adult who was sensitive to social cues and willing to offer help. According to Terry's homeroom teacher, Terry was "well-adapted" and had "good coping skills" concerning his own physical disability. For example, he would make people aware of problems by indirectly saying, "That bag sure is in everybody's way." as opposed to "Can you move your bag?" when he had difficulty maneuvering around in the classroom. Ms. Dee stated that Terry was fairly independent in terms of coming to school and attending different classes based on his own schedule. Terry was described as a hard worker who demonstrated maturity and reliability in his job performance. There was a consensus between Karen and Terry's teachers that Terry was not only well-groomed and -dressed but also maintained good hygiene. Karen said that Terry ironed his own clothes. Karen further identified Terry's life skills at

home including preparing his own lunch, washing his lunchbox, washing and cooking rice by using Chinese rice cooker, making cereal and oatmeal, and washing vegetables. Terry's interests and hobbies included biking, listening to European classical music, and visiting museums.

Terry's home school transferred him to another school to begin first grade, which was the SED compound campus, even though Karen and her husband disagreed with the school's decision. Terry had been included in GED class and spent part of his day in resource room in elementary and middle schools.

At Success High School, Terry was placed in the ASK classroom. He had a two-hour Home and Community class taught by his homeroom teacher, Ms. Dee, which targeted on building students' independent and community living skills. He also received English and math resource instruction and took one elective course with students from the GED class. Terry received individual speech therapy for 30 minutes and group speech therapy for one hour a week. During the group speech therapy, role-play was often used to help him and other students learn to greet and interact with others in a socially appropriate way. Additionally, Terry had three hours of vocational training in the afternoon, when he worked at a local bookstore. Terry's job responsibilities included: (a) using the cart to collect books from the storeroom; (b) pulling the cart with books to the display areas of fiction and non-fiction; (c) re-shelving books in alphabetical

order and in the right section of fiction and non-fiction; and (d) rearranging books on the shelves in alphabetical order.

Terry's Teachers

Two of Terry's teachers participated in the study. Ms. Dee was the homeroom teacher and Ms. Wade was the folder teacher.

Terry's homeroom teacher decided to call herself "Ms. Dee" in my study. In her early 30s, she was a first-year SED teacher through an alternative certification program. As his homeroom teacher, Ms. Dee was the contact person when Terry had problems in her Home and Community class, which included functional academics such as having community-based field trips and learning math through converting recipes. In addition, Ms. Dee also handled issues, which arose from Terry's confusions about "different schedule" of classes or when Terry experienced difficulties in interacting with other students on campus, both of which had not happened.

Ms. Dee was highly involved in Special Olympics and different agencies for exceptional students when she was in high school and college. She told me that she switched her major from SED to history with a minor in women studies because she wanted to "get a lot of everything" while she was in college. She had been working in different positions for a variety of programs that provided

services to people with disabilities, such as recreation therapy and supported living and employment after college.

Growing up in a diverse neighborhood and having a lot of Asian American friends, Ms. Dee had the least intention to teach in the local school district that was well known for "too many White people." However, she accepted the job offer at Success High School in this district based on three reasons. First, she said she could work with students of "every disability," such as autism, cerebral palsy, and mental retardation. Second, she felt the teaching faculty were supportive and had "good ideas about how to incorporate everybody into different classes." Third, from "professional and personal" aspects, she wanted to work in this district where administrators, parents, and students would push her and demand the best program from her.

Ms. Wade was assigned to be Terry's folder teacher when she started her first year of teaching at Success High School. In this role, she was responsible for handling all "academic concerns" such as problems, which occurred in Terry's resource or elective classes, and for monitoring Terry's progress based on his IEP. As a vocational teacher, Ms. Wade was not directly involved in teaching Terry but she provided necessary support and training on his job site, a local bookstore. Ms. Wade told me, for example, she would observe, shadow, and work with Terry as well as check with his supervisor periodically.

In her mid-forties, Ms. Wade had been teaching for 21 years. She started teaching in GED class then became a reading specialist. After she obtained her master's degree in SED at a local university, she began teaching in various settings for students with disabilities, including working as an independent living skills teacher for people with visual impairments. Before came to Success High School, Ms. Wade had provided "working training" to students "who are getting ready for the work force" for six years.

According to Ms. Wade, Terry was her first Taiwanese American student. Ms. Wade acknowledged her lack of knowledge of the cultural background of the family. In addition, her prior experiences of working with Korean students had made her assume that Terry was Korean. As she revealed:

> When I found out you're doing this [current study], I thought they're Korean. Cause I'm, I just never really thought about it. Just made that assumption cause there are a lot of Koreans in Austin.

As I spoke with all my participants, I noticed that all parents inevitably talked about their most negative experiences in interacting with schools and teachers during the earlier years of their children's schooling. They further indicated that these experiences had greatly influenced how they negotiated with their children's current schools. Even though their prior experiences were not the major focus of my study, and I would be unable to obtain the perspectives of the

teachers who had been involved, it was clear that their prior experiences provided the context for understanding their current views and actions. The analyses of the themes, which emerged from these accounts is presented in the next section.

Lessons Learned from Prior Experiences

Challenges to parent-teacher communication with prior schools and teachers seemed to bring new learning and insight to these parents. Struggling as well as learning through these negotiation processes, they seemed to become aware of their parental rights in their children's SED. Furthermore, they adapted to their new parental roles by using these newly acquired skills, which they believed had prepared them to better communicate with schools and teachers in their search for the best education for their children.

Two shared themes emerged from my conversations with the four parents: (a) deciphering the system as they learned how the school system worked, and (b) differing expectations of educational services and teachers' roles and responsibilities.

Deciphering the System

All three families faced a similar situation when their home school attempted to transfer their children to another school. Under these circumstances,

parents gradually began to realize that they might succeed in working through these challenges if they had more knowledge about SED.

Conflicts with the home school. When it was time for Brian to attend kindergarten after two years of early childhood SED program at one elementary school, Ms. Han and her husband requested that Brian to be placed back at their home school, Peace Elementary. She recalled:

> This elementary 不肯. 他們不肯也就算了. 你可以把 Brian 送到, 比如說, A Elementary, 這邊有個program. 他們不要, 他們要把 Brian 送到西邊那個handicap. 因為原因是那時候學區要在那邊成立一個班, 人數不夠, 沒有辦法成立, 所以硬要把 Brian 送過去.
>
> This elementary refused our request [to send Brian back to Peace Elementary]. It's all right that they disagreed with our request. They could send Brian to, for example, A Elementary, which had a [special] program. The school refused again. The school wanted to send Brian to that handicap [class] in the west side of the town because the school district planned to establish a special class at B Elementary. They did not have enough students to form a new class. Therefore, they wanted to send Brian over there by force.

Ms. Han and her husband invited advocates from a local parent support group to attend the IEP meeting. As described in a previous section, Ms. Han and her husband disagreed with the school's proposal and refused to give their consent during the meeting:

> 學校怎麼跟我講, 我都不肯, '你不必講了.' 那個班後來沒辦成. 他就留在B Elementary, 多留了一年, PPCD裡面多讀了一年.

> No matter how the school persuaded me to be in agreement with their proposal, I turned them down and told them that they would not be able to convince me [to let Brian attend B Elementary]. Eventually, that special class at B Elementary was unable to be established. Brian stayed at the PPCD program at B Elementary School for one more year.

Julie and Henry Both identified the meeting that they had with Tim's first Elementary School in Arizona as the most negative experience, although they were unsure whether it happened when Tim was in kindergarten or first grade. According to Henry, the school called for this meeting to discuss the issue of transferring Tim to another school without notifying the family of the issue in advance. Julie recalled that, during that meeting, more than 10 school professionals were "pushing" her and her husband to agree to transfer their son to a special school for children with severe disabilities:

> Tim那個時候才一年級吧, kindergarten, 大概八、九個, 十個老師這樣對我們講, 他們要我們轉, 我們不願意轉. 他們就每個人都講, '你這個你應該去那個什麼什麼.' 那次是很hurt 我, 而且我覺得真的壓力很大.
>
> At that time, Tim was in his first grade or kindergarten. There were eight to 10 teachers telling us to transfer. They wanted us to transfer but we disagreed to transfer Tim to the special school. Each one of them told us, 'You should transfer your child to that school.' That experience really hurt me very much. In addition, I really felt there was so much pressure [from the teachers and the school].

Moreover, Henry stated that the school also invited an interpreter, a woman originally from Taiwan, to attend the meeting without consulting them. However, this woman was considered to be "rude" by Julie when she spoke to

them in Chinese during that meeting. Henry further stated that, contrary to maintaining her role as an interpreter, this individual was "pressing" them into in agreement with the school:

> She did not interpret. [The] School brought her [in] probably just in case we had communication problem. But we didn't have communication problem. We did not need her. Period. That's just school's intent[ion]. That's fine with us. But we did not need her. But she might want to try to help or impress school or whatever [she] might want to do [a] better job. Anyway, she talked to us in Chinese and tried to convince us. She really went too far I think.

Since this event took place eight years ago, Henry could not remember what exactly the interpreter had said during that meeting. He commented that the interpreter "was great[ly] responsible for the things" that created an unpleasant atmosphere during that meeting.

While they were residing in another local school district, Terry's home school agreed to place Terry in a GED classroom with resource room support. However, the school suggested that Karen send Terry to another school before school began:

> 本來接受他到resource, 然後不久就說, '不能.' 老師就說, 她不能教他. 就是說, 不行. 這是對我最難過的一件事情. I cried in front of [them] and I begged. I said, '你給我一點機會, 給他再一個機會'. 我說, '我跟你合作, 你要做什麼, 你跟我講, 我在家裡教.' 都不願意.
>
> Initially, the school accepted him and planned to place him in resource room. However, they changed their mind and said 'no' later on. The [resource room] teacher said she was unable to teach him. The school

> decided not to accept Terry. This was the saddest thing I had ever experienced. I cried in front of them and I begged. I said, 'Please give me a chance and give him one more chance.' I told the teacher, 'I can cooperate with you. You tell me what you are going to teach and I can teach him at home.' She still said 'no.'

Karen understood and agreed with the teacher's rationale for her lack of adequate "training" to teach Terry, whose level was fairly "low" compared to other students in the resource room. However, she disagreed with the teacher's attitude of "not willing to try" to teach him before making the decision.

Lack of knowledge about special education. All parents except Karen agreed that their lack of knowledge about how school systems worked and what parental rights they had seemed to exacerbated their struggles with the schools.

Reflecting back on their conflicts with Brian's prior school, Ms. Han wished she knew more of parental rights than merely knowing her son was "eligible to go to public school without any pay." She elaborated:

> 那another local school district 通常因為父母比較knowledgeable, 因為他們可以接觸的resource比較多, 可以選擇的地方比較多, 所以他們可以到處看. 那我們這邊就不一樣, 當初只有兩個program, 你either到這邊或到那邊. 那這邊不收你, 你就到那邊. 那時候我們也不懂我們有這麼多rights.
>
> Those parents in another local school district are usually more knowledgeable than us because there are more available resources and more special education programs they can visit and choose. At the beginning, there were only two [special] programs in our school district. You could only send your child either to this program or to that program. If this program did not accept your child's admission, you could only send

> your child to that program. Back then, we did not know we had so many rights.

Julie recounted obstacles to negotiating the "system" that first generation immigrants or "foreigners" faced when sending their exceptional children to school. In adjusting herself to her son's disabilities, Julie found that she had no "experiences" to draw upon with regard to being a parent of a child with special needs. The difficulty was aggravated by the fact that she came from a country where no services were provided to these children:

> 在中國我們根本就沒有s[pecial education]. 我成長的當初, 我們的學校從來沒有special ed kids, 大概special ed. kids這小孩就不允許他們上學的, 我覺得在中國. 沒有special class for special needs kids, 所以我們根本就不知道 [different placements for SED].
>
> In China, we don't have s[pecial education]. When I was a student, our school had never had any special ed kids. It might be possible that special ed kids were not allowed to go to school. I think that we don't have special classes for special needs kids in China. Therefore, we don't know [about the different placements for SED].

Julie further depicted herself as "new kids in special educa[tion]" who had no experience and knowledge about U.S. society and its SED systems.

Sharing the similar thoughts with Ms. Han, both Julie and Henry did not think their son would benefit from the placement proposed by the home school. After a visit to that special school, Julie described the school as being for "mentally totally disability [*sic*]" students who had no "learning ability." She

described the major factor contributing to this negative interaction with the school professionals as her lack of experiences and knowledge in "special education" system in the U.S.:

> 開始的時候, 我覺得造成這種 [困難], 最主要一個是我們不太懂, 我們不太了解美國社會上的special education. 我覺得還是自己, 我沒有經驗. 我覺得最主要是我們 不太懂怎麼樣deal 這些事情. 剛開始的時候, 也沒有跟學校交流很多, 因為我們自己根本不知道 Tim 怎麼回事, 自己還要take time to face Tim 這個事情.
>
> At the beginning, I thought the most critical factor contributing to [the difficulty] was that we didn't know. We did not have much understanding about the special education in the U.S. society. I thought the most important factor was that I did not have any experiences. The major factor was that we did not know how to deal with these matters. At the beginning, we did not have many interactions with the school because we did not know what was the matter with Tim. We also had to take time to face Tim's situation.

Mismatched Expectations

All parents expressed their differing expectations with the school concerning academic curriculum or related services for their children. They also experienced conflicts when they had different views about the school or teacher's roles and responsibilities.

Special education services. Ms. Han stated that she usually "surprise[d]" the school by not giving consent in IEP meeting. Being aware of her limited interactions with other parents of exceptional students on a regular basis, Ms. Han

usually made an effort to call these parents before the IEP meeting in order to gather related information:

> 別的家長就說, '我們又得到什麼樣的協助.' Oh, 又出賣我, 然後我就會在 IEP 的中間提出來, '為什麼某某某某人可以得到這樣子service, 為什麼我們不行, 我不簽字.'
>
> Other parents would say, 'We got certain type of assistance.' Oh. These teachers betrayed me again. Usually, I would raise these issues during IEP meeting by saying, 'Why so and so can have this service? Why can't we? I won't sign on the paper."

Karen clearly identified mismatched expectations as the major source to cause conflicts with Terry's former teachers in early childhood SED program and elementary schools:

> 剛開始的時候是很多的struggling. Because那個時候expectation不同. 我覺得發生衝突, 我覺得expectation 的不同. 那個時候, 因為覺得他還年輕, 還可以. 可是老師就覺得, 不可以. 所以就是說, 這是雙方的learning process.
>
> At the beginning, we had a lot of struggles because of differing expectations. I think these conflicts with teachers resulted from our differing expectations. Back then, because he was still young, we thought that he had the ability [to learn and do certain things] while the teachers thought that he was incapable of doing something. This is a learning process for both parents and teachers.

Karen pinpointed that middle school was the toughest stage for Terry because the teachers had insufficient knowledge about Terry's exceptionalities

and appropriate instructional methodologies. She recalled Terry's 6th grade English resource teacher had an extremely "negative" attitude about Terry:

> 她說他根本不會讀chapter book, 非常negative. I'm surprised. Even 他不會, 你都不應該這樣講. It's challenging of him to do that, to read a chapter book. 我跟她說, 你把它chop down into小的paragraph. 他就可以. '他沒辦法independent讀' Of course, he cannot. He needs your help. That's why he is in resource. 所以 I don't think that's a good program, good teacher at all.

> The teacher said that Terry was totally incapable of reading chapter books and she had very negative comments. I'm surprised. Even if he was incapable of doing so, you, as a teacher, should not say so. It's challenging of him to do that, to read a chapter book. I told the teacher that you needed to chop down the chapter into small paragraphs. Consequently, he would be able to read. The teacher said, 'He could not read the book independently.' Of course, he cannot. He needs your help. That's why he is in resource. Therefore, I don't think that's a good program, good teacher at all.

Roles and responsibilities of the school and teacher. Ms. Han expected the SED teacher to be the "gatekeeper," who needed to be honest with the parents regarding what services were beneficial for the child's education. She further emphasized the importance of having the support of the SED teachers:

> 老師很重要, 應該是要站在家長、孩子這邊. 如果老師不能做到, 站到學校立場去, 我就會懷疑這個老師是不是 lazy, 想 cut off, 就可以少做一點, 少involve 一點. 學校一定要以孩子的利益為先. 而且是直接利益, 直接受到service.

> Special education teachers are very important. They should be on the side of parents and children. If the teacher stood by the school's side rather than by the parent' side, I would think if this teacher was lazy and wanted to cut off [some services]. Therefore, this teacher could do less work and became less involved. The school has to put the benefit of the child as the first priority. Moreover, it should be direct benefit and direct service.

When Brian's SED teacher at the former school proposed to transfer Brian to another school, Ms. Han stated:

> 一個 gatekeeper不好的話, 那個case就沒有希望了. 後來我就跟我先生講, 真的是看老師. 他表面上跟你裝的很好那樣, 可是私底下扯你後腿, 你也沒輒.
>
> If the gatekeeper was not a good one, the case [exceptional student] would have no chance [to succeed or to develop his/her learning potentials]. Later on I told my husband that it [student's educational success] was mainly depending on the [SED] teacher. The teacher could pretend to be very nice to you but betraying you behind your back. However, you could not do anything about it.

Ms. Han further mentioned that the principal played the key role in turning down their request to send Brian back to Peace Elementary:

> 最主要是校長不贊成. 問題是她懂什麼東西. 她根本不認識 Brian, 她懂什麼東西. 她完全站在她的這個所謂的school policy跟學校的budget. 她聽了那個special education的老師講了以後, 她就一點都不能變..
>
> The primary reason was the principal, who disagreed [with our request for Brian to attend Peace Elementary]. The question was, what did she know? She didn't even know Brian. She knew nothing [about Brian]. She only took the so-called school policy and school budgeting into consideration for her decision-making. She would not change her decision after she heard what the special education teacher said [about the recommendation for Brian's placement].

Differing expectations held by school personnel at Tim's former school appeared to contradict Julie's expectations for Tim. She felt that the school was trying to "take it easy" and showed no support for her son's education when they proposed the plan to transfer Tim to another special school:

> 我們那個學校不太好. 這是個客觀原[因], 外觀原因. 學校不太好, 老師不是很support, 就是principal, 就是學校校長不是很support, 這些都是原因.
>
> That school was not a good one. This was an objective factor, an external factor. The school was not a good school. Teachers were not very supportive. Even the school principal was not very supportive. All of these are factors [explain this negative experience with the school].

In spite of the fact that Tim was causing some problems in the GED class, both Julie and Henry firmly believed that the school should have had a better way of resolving the problem rather than pushing him out of the school. Henry argued:

> Probably Tim has a lot of problems in the regular class. However, it doesn't mean Tim has to stay in that kind of environment and they will not have Tim. But the problem is it's easy for school. I mean more or less. I understand a kid like Tim will cause problems for the school and teachers. Of course they don't [want problems.] They do this [transferring him to another school]. [Problem] solved. That's no doubt about it. But the question is how to solve the problem. It's easier just to send him to somewhere. They don't deal with him any more. That's an easy way for them. But this is very irresponsible.

Approaches to Successfully Communicating with Teachers

Apparently, all parents rethought what characteristics and skills a parent should possess in order to improve parent-teacher communication by utilizing their experiential backgrounds, which were reviewed in the previous section. Two themes that emerged from parents' accounts of their learning processes were (a) the new parent in school and (b) establishing a positive relationship with teachers.

The New Parent in School

All parents recognized that their challenges and struggles originated either from their unfamiliarity with their child's disability and the American SED system, or from their uncertainty about how to be a parent of an exceptional child. Collectively, they mentioned that (a) they employed several strategies to build up their knowledge base about SED and parental rights, and (b) they experienced changes in personality characteristics to some extent during their negotiation with the schools and teachers to ensure the best education for their children.

Expanding knowledge base. Seeking professional help in the community was identified as the first step by these four parents. These community resources were composed of doctors including neurologists and pediatricians, parent support groups, and early childhood intervention programs, occupational and speech therapists, private tutors, and networks with other parents.

For these four parents, medical doctors or neurologists appeared to be the main person who was able to provide their children a diagnosis and served as resource people for medical information and knowledge. For example, Ms. Han illustrated what a doctor's visit was like:

> 這孩子有沒有做OT, 有沒有做speech, 他就在那邊後面push 我們. 然後一直到他四歲, 然後他就慢慢跟我們介紹, 為什麼會有這樣子的情形, 孩子的腦部那裡, 據醫學理論怎麼樣判斷, 現在醫學理論還沒有辦法證實, 他就介紹這些醫學的知識給我們, 每次大概20到25分鐘, 很簡短. 每三個月看看這個孩子怎麼樣.
>
> He [The neurologist] would push us and check if the child was receiving OT or speech [therapy]. When he turned four, gradually, he began to tell us the reasons why Brian behaved in certain ways, which part of Brian's brain [was damaged], how to make medical judgment based on medical theories, or why there was no conclusive theory to explain the cause [of autism]. He would pass on the medical knowledge to us. The doctor's visit was very short lasting about 20 to 25 minutes. He just checked how the child was doing every three months.

Both Ms. Han and Karen commented that they decided to continue private speech and occupational therapies after their children graduated from the early childhood intervention program. They emphasized that occupational therapists, speech therapists, and private tutors were essential professionals, from whom they learned the practical skills to work with and teach their children. Ms. Han's stated that the occupational and speech therapists were the first teachers who enlightened Brian. She further elaborated:

她 [Occupational therapist] 給我很多這個sensory integration 的 information, 她告訴我什麼是sensory integration 的problem是什麼東西, 然後 speech therapist 基本上是告訴我怎麼教孩子說話. 她們講得都是非常實際的東西, 所以我們就從她們兩位身上, 一直在學一直在學, 看他們怎麼做, 然後再modify, 攙入我們自己的想法, 然後就慢慢一點一點把他拉起來這樣子.

The occupational therapist provided me the information about sensory integration and she also explained what problems would occur if there was something wrong with the sensory integration. Basically, the speech therapist told me how to teach Brian to speak. Both of them talked about very practical skills. Therefore, we just kept learning and learning from them. We observed how they worked with Brian and then modified their plans with our own ideas. Slowly and gradually, we brought Brian up step by step.

Julie noticed the flyer of the local parent support group, which was sent home with the school newsletter, she decided to call and request related information directly from the organization. Julie described that she tried to acquaint herself with knowledge in SED by attending workshops provided by this organization:

他們就以後就經常一直是給我send最新的什麼meeting啦, 最新的 seminar啦. 比如說. 那我也有去parents training啊這些. 那就是try get information as much as possible. 我覺得這個很重要. 因為你沒有訊息, 不了[解]. [你]要對美國這個社會了解, 對它的system, 對special education要了解一點. 那我現在還是不是了解很多, 就是還是在慢慢慢慢. 但是就是有點sense了.

> They [The organization] started sending the latest schedules of meetings and seminars. For example, I had been to the parent training program. I just tried to get as much information as possible. I think it is very important to obtain information. If you don't have it, you won't be able to understand. You have to understand American society such as the [school] system and special education. At this point, I still don't have sufficient understanding. However, I am getting there gradually and beginning to have some sense about these [school system and SED].

Around the same time that Terry was identified as having disabilities, Karen was admitted to the SED master's program at a local university for the purpose of understanding Terry's disability and how she could help him. Karen sent then eighteen-month-old Terry to "physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech" therapy after he was identified as having special needs. In addition, she hired a private tutor to work with Terry when she realized she was too "emotional" to teach him. She highlighted the importance of the tutor in her acquisition of practical skills:

> 他三歲的時候, 我就請家教了, 就請人家來家裡 home tutor. 教他教我都有. 其實就是現在home program 一樣, 就是sit side by side, 她在教的時候, 她做, 然後我就看, 然後說換我來做, 就這樣子.
>
> When Terry he was three, I already hired a tutor, like a home tutor. This tutor taught Terry and me. The tutor is also known as an in-home trainer who provides an in-home program. We would sit side by side. I would observe how she did it when she was teaching Terry. Afterwards, I would take over and practice how to teach Terry. That's [how I learned].

Except Karen, the other three parents mentioned conversing with other parents as a way for them to obtain ideas and information about available SED

services and parental rights. As described earlier, Ms. Han usually contacted other parents before the IEP meeting to find out what services were provided to their children. She continued on how she became knowledgeable of her parental rights:

> 後來是一路上一直fight fight fight, 很多家長告訴我們, 我們有這個 right, 有這個right, 這個right, 我們才慢慢了解. 你學到的都是一路上, 慢慢一點一點從各個不同的人的對話中提出來.
>
> We fight, fight, [and] fight all the way for Brian. During this process, many parents told us that we had this right, this right, and this right. Afterwards, we began to learn about [our parental right] gradually. All you have learned [about parental rights] were from all of these conversations that you had with every different parent.

Observing how other parents exercised their parental rights in their children's education, Ms. Han detailed how she activated her parental rights to demand services for Brian:

> 我也看到別的家長都這樣fight. '為什麼他有, 我沒有. 那大家都繳一樣的稅啊, 你憑什麼他有我沒有.' 就是像這個樣子啊, 一點點學.
>
> I saw how other parents fight, 'Why does that student have [this service] and I don't? We all pay our taxes. Why can those parents have [that service for their child] and I can't?' I just learn [how to exercise my rights] little by little based on what I have observed.

Henry stated that he gathered information about Tim's disability by "talking to other parents of [children with] Asperger, autism." Julie emphasized that parents of exceptional children should have communication among themselves not only to provide support but also to exchange ideas:

大家都有special needs的kids, maybe different level, different 的label的, 但是會有很多同感. 就是說, 你也get 很多support, 你也get很多idea怎麼跟老師去講.

We all have special needs kids. Maybe our kids have different levels and labels, but we, parents share the similar feelings. [By talking with them,] you can get lots of support and ideas about how to communicate with teachers.

Adapted personality characteristics. All parents but Henry noted changes in their personality characteristics after years of dealing with different schools and teachers. Ms. Han stated:

我從小都是模範生, 乖乖的. 我現在這麼tough, 是被這個系統、學校訓練出來的, 這麼多年. 學校不給, 我也知道要怎麼處理了. 美國人會欺負你的, 如果你一直讓. 你要爭取, 像老美家長都很兇, 很積極爭取孩子的權利和服務. 你一但兇學校, 學校以後不會馬馬虎虎了, 會對你的態度不一樣.

I was always the model student during my schooling years. I was obedient student. Now I become so tough because I was well-trained by the [U.S.] system and schools after so many years. If the school did not agree to provide certain services, I know how to deal with it now. Americans would take advantage of you if you keep yielding to them. You have to demand and fight for it. Like American parents, they are very tough and proactive to fight for their children's rights and services. Once you show the school your toughness, the school will not think that you are pretty easy and will take your words seriously. They will show a very different attitude toward you.

Although Henry did not explicitly mention any character changes during interviews, he did notice the attitudinal changes, "respect," showed by Tim's first

elementary school. He described himself as being “mentally very strong” which helped him to deal successfully with this stressful situation:

> I don’t think they show respect by pressing force and try to force parents accept this [their proposal]. Actually, after that very tough meeting, they talked to us differently. They probably found out what kind of people we are. They probably found out we are not [that] kind of people they could just force us. They actually showed [us] more respect. They deal with [us] more nicely.

Julie identified some key changes in her character including being “zhu dong,” or “proactive,” and “strong” and ready to “push” for better parent-teacher communication in order to benefit her son’s education. From her viewpoint, she had transformed from passively responding to negative phone calls from school to becoming “zhu dong,” or “proactive,” in sharing information from home with the teacher:

> 我覺得經過那麼多年, 你自己變得主動很多. 你有想法, 你看到了什麼, 你自己會很主動跟老師去communicate. 這個從被動變到主動, 可能都是需要一個時間.
>
> After so many years, I think you will become more “zhu dong” [proactive]. When you have ideas, when you notice something, you will “zhu dong” [take the initiative to] communicate with the teacher. It needs to take some time to change from being “bei dong” [passive] to being “zhu dong” [proactive].

Being “zhu dong” became an effective strategy for Julie to get information of how Tim was doing at school even if one of his former teachers was initially not willing to provide his home phone:

所有的special老師都給我們home phone number. 因為in case 這些孩子都會有emergency, something happen. 這老師他不願意, for some reason, 他不願意給. 所以他不是很主動給我們消息. 那我還是會跟他講, 講的當中, 人就conversation, 他也就 'oh, 他在學校裡怎麼怎麼.' 他也會和你講. 就是做為parents, 我覺得自己主動一點, 要很主動. 我覺得要share, 不管他share 不share, 就是說我, 你的side, 你要主動去share你的東西. 因為share 當中, 他也會告訴你學校的東西.

All the previous special education teachers would give us their home phone numbers. Just in case these kids might have an emergency, something might happen. This teacher was not willing to [give us his home number]. For some reason, he was not willing to [give us his home number]. Therefore, he was not "zhu dong" to provide us information. But I still told him. When I talked, the conversation just took place. He would say, 'Oh. Tim was like so and so at school.' He would tell you. Being parents, I think we have to be more "zhu dong." You have to be "zhu dong" to share your information because when you began sharing, he would tell you things that happened at school.

In contrast to the other three parents, Karen portrayed herself as a "pretty direct" and highly involved parent. Although she was a "pretty direct" person in terms of communication, Karen emphasized that she was direct only when she demanded certain services to which her son was entitled to:

如果我知道那是我的right, 你又不給我的時候, 我就會很direct, 我就很sharp了. 我通常不會很sharp. 譬如說, bus. 是他們需要provide. 他竟然說, 我們不能provide. 我就會這樣. [When the school is not providing services that are considered as my rights, I will become very direct. I will be very sharp with my words. For example, the school needs to provide bus for my child. If the school said, 'No, we could not provide the bus services.' I will tell them directly.] 'Is that so? Oh. I see. But I thought it's a policy or it's a school's responsibility to provide the transportation.'

Establishing a Positive Relationship with the Teacher

All mothers noted the impact of building personal relationships with teachers on the quality of SED provided to their child. They described three strategies to cultivate relationships with teachers: (a) recognizing teachers' limits and supplementing what they cannot do, (b) focusing on what teachers can do, and (c) showing parents' appreciation.

Recognizing and supplementing what the school and teachers cannot do. Both Ms. Han and Karen attributed the limits of schools in providing SED services to political reasons. Ms. Han commented on the proposal raised by Brian's former school:

> 學校不應該只看到學校的budget, 學校應該要看到孩子, 怎麼樣做對孩子是有利的. 不能一味的光看到school budget, 就想把孩子變成他們policy決策下的犧牲. 因為他們要成立那個班, 他們就要把孩子往那邊推.
>
> The school should not only be concerned about school budget. They should take the child into consideration and think what they can do to make the child benefit the most. They should not just be concerned about school budget. They should not make the child a sacrifice of the school policy. They should not push the child to the other school because they wanted to establish a special class there.

As stated in a previous section, Ms. Han viewed the SED teacher as the "gatekeeper," who needed to be honest with the parents regarding what services were beneficial for the child's education. She also mentioned that the principal

might not necessarily agree to provide these needed educational services to the student because of "political" reasons, such as budgeting issue. As a result, parents should be the one to fight for those services as recommended by the "gatekeeper."

In addition to recognizing these barriers from the administrative level, Ms. Han turned to other available resources, such as private therapists and tutors, to provide supplemental assistance to her son:

> 然後現在到這個程度的話, 學校能夠offer什麼, 對他有什麼幫助, 我們大概都已經知道了, 所以我們也不要求學校太多. 學校畢竟它能offer的有限, 如果父母口袋裡有錢, 當然是找最好的resource.
>
> By now, we know almost everything about what school can offer and how school can help Brian. Therefore, we do not ask too much from the school because the school has its limits in terms of offering services. If the parents have money in their pocket, they surely can find the best resource [to help their child].

As a special educator, Karen portrayed the dilemma faced by the school as providing individualized assistance to each exceptional student:

> 老師要知道孩子的level, 那需要有好的curriculum 來fit 這孩子的level. 那curriculum是學校provide, 然後有些service, 譬如說, OT, PT, adapted PE, adapted music, 這些special 的program, 怎麼樣做inclusion, 這都跟學校policy有關係的. 學校policy又跟他的staff很有關係, 因為有夠的budget, 有夠的manpower才能夠來support. 而這個manpower要夠qualify的manpower, 才能夠support這些孩子的需要, 然後父母的需要.

> The teacher needs to know the child's level and have good curriculum to fit the child's level. The curriculum is provided by the school, so are services, such as OT, PT, adapted PE, and adapted music. The entire special program and how to provide inclusion class are related to school policy, which is related to the school staff. The school needs enough budget [money] so they can hire enough manpower to provide support [SED to students]. Moreover, the school needs qualified manpower so that they can support [meet] the students' needs as well as the parents' needs.

Karen further commented that was a difficult task for the school and teachers by stating "They really tried their part already. I really see that." Consequently, Karen supplemented what was missing from the teachers in order to avoid any conflicts with teachers:

> 這個孩子的一生不是只有在老師的手中, 也不是只有在父母的手中, 乃是在父母, society跟老師的手中. 都要配合的. 我覺得他已經到這麼大了, 所以我有society的support, 我有老師support, 我就用他們可以support給我的那一份. 那我就來盡我這一份. 所以我就不會跟他們衝突, 因為我有在盡我這一份.
>
> The child's future is not just under the control of the teachers neither the parents. The child was under the control of the parents, the teachers, and the society. These three parties need to collaborate. He [Terry] is already a young adolescent. Therefore, I have social support and teachers' support. I just use whatever support the teacher is able to offer and I will do my part to support Terry. Consequently, I won't have any conflicts with them because I am providing my support [to Terry].

Julie recognized that the teacher was limited by having so many students in one classroom. Hiring a tutor to work with Tim did not seem to be effective

because he was not easily redirected to study. Consequently, Julie and her husband supervised and taught Tim to do homework at home.

Focusing on the positive aspects. Both Ms. Han and Karen learned to focus on the positive side of what school and teachers could do in their children's educational process. Their intention was to establish positive personal relationships with all involved teachers that would better their child's education. Ms. Han recalled seeing Brian's former SED teacher who had recommended that Brian attend another school; she still made an effort to maintain a relationship with this teacher:

> 我現在看到那個老師, 我還很假意嘻嘻笑, 其實我心裡很恨那個老師, 可是要維持好的關係啊, 你怎麼知道那天你會碰到這個老師, 是不是?
>
> When I see this teacher now, I still smile at this teacher pretentiously. Even though I hate this teacher so much in my mind, I still need to maintain good relationships. You never know that your child might end up with this teacher again in the future, right?

Karen was aware that her educational and experiential backgrounds in SED might be "threatening" to teachers when she made any suggestions concerning Terry's education. Consequently, she learned to be silent about her dissatisfaction to maintain good relationships with the teachers. Karen avoided having conflicts with teachers by concentrating what they could do:

> I've learned something. 我覺得怎麼樣父母跟老師或學校配合的好就是, 我儘量recognize他們所做的, 然後至於他們做不到的部份, 我覺得我已

經come to my sense 就是, 我自己來補, 我自己來做. I could have complained a lot more. 但是我不願意再扮演那個角色, 因為It won't help.

I've learned something. I think as long as parents can work well with the teachers or the school, then it's OK. I try my best to recognize what they [school and teachers] have accomplished. With respect to what they cannot do, I have come to my sense [a decision], which is that I will supplement and make up what they cannot do. I could have complained a lot more but I don't want to play that role any more. Because it won't help.

Expressing appreciation. All three families showed their appreciation by providing compliments and giving gifts to involved teachers during holidays, such as Christmas and Valentine's Day:

平常的時候, 講話, 在寫notes的時候, 要常常謝謝他們, 這是關係裏很重要的一點. 其他每個老師到現在跟我們都有聯絡, 都很好.

Normally, when talking to them [teachers] or writing notes, you have to thank them all the time. This is a very important part for personal relationships. All of Brian's previous teachers still maintain contacts with us even now. We have good relationships. (Ms. Han)

Holiday呢, 這美國嘛, 這是一個culture, Christmas 啊, Valentine's Day 啊. 我覺得中國人本來也是很重禮, 並不是說你要送一個大的禮物. 老師很不容易, even bus driver 這些, 但是我覺得這也是一個人和人之間的溝通. 他們也很happy 這些. 我覺得most 大概這裡的parents都會送, specially這些special education teacher 很辛苦的. 那我覺得special teacher, 包括 teacher assist[ant], 每一個人都working hard, 都貢獻很多. 我覺得他們deserve 應該有, 所以我都會給他們禮物在Christmas.

> Holidays. This is a culture in the U.S., like Christmas and Valentine's Day. I think Chinese people value gift-giving practices but it does not necessarily mean that you have to prepare an expensive gift. Teachers are working so hard, even the bus driver too. And I think this is part of person-to-person communication. They are very happy when receiving gifts. I think most of the parents here will send gifts, particularly to these special education teachers who work so hard. I think special [education] teachers, including the teacher assist[ant], have been working so hard and they have made a lot of contributions [to my child's education]. I think they all deserve it. Therefore, I will give them gifts when Christmas comes. (Julie)

> 有的我實在從心裡感謝, 是真的. 尤其我們的孩子又特別, 就特別人家照顧嘛. Yea. I know I don't have to and yet I do that. 這種也是中國人 culture 的一部份.

> I thank some of the teachers from the bottom of my heart. It is true. Particularly, our son has special needs and teachers have to take special care of him. I know I don't have to and yet I do that [give gifts to teachers]. This is part of the Chinese culture.

Summary

In this chapter, thick descriptions of contextual information are presented to better readers' understanding of the results of current study, which are described in Chapter Five. In order to achieve this goal, the profiles of participating teachers and families of the three exceptional Chinese American students were portrayed. Challenges experienced by parents when encountering their children's former schools included deciphering the U.S. education system and facing different expectations held by the school and teachers. Learning from these lessons, they employed a variety of approaches to better parent-teacher

communication. These strategies contained redefining their parental roles in relation to their children's educational process and focusing on establishing positive relationships with the teachers. Chapter Five focuses on presenting themes as related to perspectives on parent-teacher communication from these four parents and currently involved teachers.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF THEMES

As presented in the previous chapter, these four parents' insights and realizations from prior experiences during the early years of their children's schooling were reflected in their approaches to communicating with current schools and teachers. This chapter has been arranged around the three major topics under investigation, from the perspectives of parents and teachers: (a) perceived successful communication; (b) perceived challenges to communication; and (c) perceptions of components for effective communication. Under each section, themes that emerged from participants are presented. Furthermore, the interplay of parent and teacher narratives around the critical incidents, when available, further illustrates the interactive nature of the communication process between parents and teachers.

Perceptions of Successful Parent-Teacher Interaction: Uniting for Success

As parents and teachers shared their views about their successful interactions with each other, they appeared to agree that successful communication resulted in their coming together, to unite and work for success. Yet, as they elaborated their views, clear differences emerged in how each group defined "success." From the teachers' perspective, ensuring students' school

success involved three crucial components that appeared to be student centered: parental support, collaboration with parents and related professionals, and achieving the desired outcome. In contrast, none of the parents identified the three components as mentioned by teachers. Parents seemed to focus exclusively on interactions as a way to develop personal relationships that, in turn, would support school success for their children. To a lesser extent, some teachers recognized the importance of personal relationships in parent-teacher interactions.

Parental Support

From the perspective of Ms. Lee, Brian's teacher, Ms. Han not only supported her but also recognized her effort to put children and parents as her "first priority." Ms. Lee shared an example from one of her conversations with Ms. Han who said:

> 'You stand up just like you take the child's side, don't you?' It meant a lot to me, because she doesn't come into the room. She doesn't see what I do inside.

Appreciation from Ms. Han was also identified by Ms. Brown, Brian's four-grade teacher, as the most positive aspect of their parent-teacher communication:

> She is very supportive of what's best for Brian. I think every time I meet with her, she appreciates everything that we're trying to do to help Brian.

According to Ms. Brown, Ms. Han was "very supportive and open" to what she or other teachers had suggested with regards to Brian's education. Ms. Brown felt that she had gained support from Ms. Han in the area of academic work as well as disciplinary procedures:

> When I tell her [Ms. Han], 'Brian has problem with this and I think he needs to serve time out.' She is very supportive, 'Oh yes. Put him in time out.'

In addition, Ms. Brown thought Ms. Han was "very positive" and "generous" about what she could do to help with the whole class:

> She brings treats a lot and she goes above and beyond to really help our class and other students in the class. That's been very positive to have that relationship.

Knowing that Henry was working on Tim's academic skills at home, Ms. Morgan was worried that Tim's parents' expectations "were a little bit unrealistic with" Tim. Following the parent-teacher conference before the IEP meeting in late February 2001, Ms. Morgan's concerns were relieved:

> Because they were really concerned about his behaviors and about his socialization and trying to get him in with kids as much as he could be to socialize, and get some conversational skills going. And those are the things that I thought were most important. But I guess I didn't really get that until this meeting. And so I was like, 'Oh. OK. We are on the same page. Great! Fantastic.'

Moreover, Ms. Morgan felt that Tim's parents were being open and supportive to share their experiences and knowledge with her. Consequently, this

information sharing process had helped her get to know and work more effectively with Tim.

Ms. Dee, Terry's teacher, perceived Karen as a "supportive" parent who came forward and asked "definite questions" about how instruction would be delivered and what the students would do in the class. When Ms. Dee was about to offer the course of Home and Community, many parents were concerned if "there wasn't actual learning and no academic" components like what the former teacher did last year:

> She [Karen] was concerned. Once we explained that, 'Oh this is how we [Ms. Dee and the teaching assistants] gonna work it [academic skills in this course] in.' And she was like, 'OK.That sounds great.' So that impression I got was she is comfortable with what we were doing.

Ms. Dee commented that Karen was a parent who was "demanding" but in a reasonable way. More than a caring parent to her own child, Karen had extended her caring to other students with special needs:

> Karen is certainly a good example of that. I mean she is teaching a class after school to all of our students. She's been to the meetings for this Parents Network. She is a really good example of just the really focused parent who has a lot of good questions.

Ms. Wade, Terry's teacher, also believed that parents and teachers should unite "as a team working together" for the benefit of the student. Ms. Wade not only took the parents' "input" into consideration but also felt her own

recommendations to parents were valued. She detailed her thoughts of feeling supported by Terry's parents:

> They work with him [Terry] at home and they're open to what the teachers do. And they are positive about what the teacher is doing. That's what I mean by support that they realize that we're mutually interested in helping Terry and then just by expressing positive reinforcement for what we do is good support.

Ms. Wade was certain that she and Karen had agreed that preparing Terry "emotionally and educationally" was in his best interest. As she emphasized, the support and positive feedback she had received from Karen had kept her focused on ensuring the success of Terry in his education and current job.

Collaboration

According to Ms. Lee, Ms. Han "always" addressed her concerns or questions in her email. In response to her concerns, Ms. Lee explained how she "problem solve[d]" with Ms. Han:

> I am always trying to work things out for Brian and compromise with her. Say, 'Maybe, let's try this.' I want to take her suggestion and I take her suggestion seriously. And I let her know what I can do.

Ms. Lee stated that the two goals that she and Ms. Han had agreed to work together had been achieved. The first goal was to help Brian do his homework at home. Knowing that Brian had a tutor who helped him with homework five days a week, Ms. Lee shared her concern with Ms. Han about the family expenses if

Brian continued working with the tutor "all the way to high school." Ms. Lee recalled Ms. Han told her that:

> He's [Brian is] not willing to do it by himself. So we kind of brainstormed and came up the plan to have him start working on his homework slowly by himself. And he has been doing that.

Teaching Brian appropriate "social skills" was the second area of concern that both Ms. Lee and Ms. Han had "talked about" and "worked on." After the problem-solving process with Ms. Han, Ms. Lee described that she "change[d] things around a lot" in the playgroup such as numbers of students and types of activities to keep other GED students coming to the group.

Ms. Gable believed that all involved teachers had done "a pretty good job" of taking Brian's needs and his parental expectations into consideration. In addition, there was collaborative effort among the teaching staff. There were three different teaching assistants taking turns to assist Brian in Ms. Gable's classroom. Ms. Gable stated that she had frequent discussions with these teaching assistants about what strategies worked and what did not work for Brian.

Ms. Gable believed that Brian would not achieve what he had been achieving now without the high expectations and strong support from his parents. Furthermore, she believed that teamwork also contributed to Brian's competencies in the areas of academics and social skills:

> Because it's taken all of everybody working with Brian. The speech teacher, and the occupational therapist, and playgroup, and I think all of these things help Brian to be as successful as he's been.

Ms. Gable mentioned that not only current teachers but also former teachers who had worked with Brian had contributed to his success:

> I know the people he had last year were excellent. He wouldn't be at this point now if it wasn't for the people he worked with last year.

The communication process was facilitated by "a team" of teachers communicating with Ms. Han through the notebook as stated by Ms. Brown. Moreover, Ms. Brown concluded that the SED staff had been "using themselves as a vehicle" to keep the communication open between Ms. Han and herself. "We're all working as a team to communicate with her."

Ms. Brown felt the parent-teacher conference in mid-October "went very well." She commented that both parents and teachers involved were "all in agreement" on how to make Brian "be more successful" in school:

> It seems like we all really work well together as a team to coordinate how we can best meet his [Brian's] needs with the aid and the special ed teacher and the parents. I felt like you know the saying, 'It takes a village to raise a child.' I kind of feel like that's how we are with Brian. We just all try to work together and communicate with each other so that we can do what's best for him.

Ms. Morgan commented that Tim's parents not only recognized but also were willing to collaborate to ensure Tim's success. There was one occasion that Ms. Morgan had tried almost all of her strategies but nothing was helping to

manage Tim's behaviors. She decided to make Tim write an email to his father about his day at school. Seeing Tim "was fine for the rest of the day" after receiving the email from his father, Ms. Morgan stated:

> It's really good that his dad was willing in the middle of his workday to stop and respond. I've only done that once but his dad realized because it was only once that I was needing help at that point cause I didn't know what else to do with him.

Reflecting back the annual IEP meeting of Terry, in addition to parental support, Ms. Wade also credited the success of Terry to support from her team workers at school:

> And we had a lot of inputs from other staff members, which are really good and just a lot of people collaborating and getting some goals [from IEP] achieved as a result of that collaboration.

Achieving the Desired Outcome

Ms. Lee considered "seeing Brian get something out of it [communication]" as the success resulting form parent-teacher communication. To ensure the schooling success of Brian, Ms. Lee emphasized the importance of problem solving with Ms. Han as described in the previous section. Concerning Brian's social goal, Ms. Lee had heard from other teachers that Brian seemed to interact a lot more with other students in classes he attended. Ms. Lee said:

> It wasn't just until like the last couple of months are there some improvement. He started to speak out more and talked to his friends more.

Like Ms. Lee, Ms. Gable also considered seeing that Brian "kind of comes out" of his world and connected to others as the success of the parent-teacher communication. She believed that parents and all involved school personnel shared the common goal for Brian in order to work together for him to achieve academically and socially. With respect to academic goals, Ms. Gable thought that the parents were "reasonable" about their demands and expectations of her and Brian:

> They want him to do as much as what the other children are doing. They also realize sometimes, we have to modify things for him. Like only having him do a certain part of the test, or cut the work down. But they are very realistic about that.

Ms. Dee perceived the "graduation talk" as the most positive parent-teacher communication because Karen did talk to other professionals following Ms. Dee's suggestion. Moreover, Karen decided to let Terry stay at school one more year, which was "the direction" desired by Ms. Dee.

There was another discussion about "health behavioral concern" which was a "productive" meeting as described by Ms. Dee. She thought it was a "typical parent-teacher-student interaction" when three of them discussed what happened and what could be done to solve the problem with a bathroom incident:

> It was a very good meeting, good conversation and productive certainly. We haven't seen any or heard of any other continuous situation [in the bathroom] like we had that time.

Ms. Wade described the IEP meeting as a positive one since the meeting

had accomplished “what was supposed” to be accomplished. In this case, Terry had achieved “specific goals” stated in his IEP throughout the year. Ms. Wade explained:

> I thought it [IEP meeting] went very well because it showed us that we had met certain objectives that we had established for this year and pointed us to other directions, new directions to build on what’s accomplished this year.

Ms. Wade had contacted Karen concerning Terry and “some signs of poor bathroom issues.” Receiving a gift from Karen and seeing no more poor bathroom behaviors exhibited by Terry satisfied Ms. Wade about her interactions with Karen. After their communication, the problems were solved and their concerns were alleviated.

Establishing Personal Relationships

All mothers expressed the importance of building personal relationships through interactions with teachers. These relationships, in turn, would ensure their children’s school success.

According to Ms. Han, she and Ms. Gable lived in the same neighborhood and they had an established personal relationship since Ms. Gable taught her elder son in first grade and Brian in third grade. To her, they were “friends.” She recalled that Ms. Gable used to contact her when the former SED teacher continued delaying the operation of the playgroup:

她馬上就打電話給我, ‘他們playgroup 還是沒有開始, 妳到底有沒有去跟校長講啊?’ 她就會告訴我. 我又馬上一通電話, ‘playgroup 還沒開始.’ 校長說, ‘妳怎麼知道?’ 我說, ‘我有去看啦.’ 所以最主要的是妳跟那些老師有私下的關係.

She [Ms. Gable] would call me right away and said, ‘They still have not started the playgroup. Have you ever talked to the principal?’ She would tell me [about the progress of starting the playgroup]. I would then call [the principal] and tell him, ‘The playgroup has not started yet’. The principal would ask me, ‘How do you know?’ I told him, “ I had come in to visit the special education class.’ The most crucial thing is that you need to have personal relationships with teachers.

Ms. Han kept emphasizing the importance of building personal relationships with teachers for the benefit of her child’s education. One of the benefits was that she could remain informed of school matters even though she did not visit the school or her child’s class as often as other parents did as stated in the previous excerpt.

Learning from her previous experiences of dealing with school personnel, Ms. Han had concluded that all parents should have the ability to pick up verbal and nonverbal cues from teachers during meetings. The personal relationships could increase her familiarity with the teachers so that she learned to read nonverbal cues better. She elaborated:

身為一個家長, 你要會察言觀色. 開會的時候, 如果老師不講話, 可能就有什麼不對勁了.

> Being a parent, you have to be able to pick up verbal and nonverbal cues. During a meeting, if the teacher did not say anything, it might be possible that there was something wrong.

In mid-October, both parents attended a routine parent-teacher conference with Ms. Brown and other school personnel including math and inclusion math teachers, and the speech therapist. In fact, Ms. Han noticed the speech therapist who had been working with her son since he was three, did not talk much during that conference:

> Parent-teacher conference 只是做秀, 很 political, 假的. 那些人中只有 speech therapist 是真心的, 她不搭腔, 我就知道事情有問題. 我們認識她有六年了.
>
> That parent-teacher conference was a routine one. It was very political and a fake one. Among those people, only the speech therapist was sincere. When she did not talk much during the conference. I just knew something was wrong. We had known her for six years.

Ms. Han found out after talking with the speech therapist that what was presented by teachers in the conference, such as modified curriculum and tests, was not actually carried out in class.

Ms. Gable stated there were established personal relationships between Ms. Han and her that had made them both feel "comfortable" talking to each other. As the former teacher of Ms. Han's elder son, Ms. Gable had already worked with Ms. Han and developed their parent-teacher relationships. Furthermore, she

credited their personal connections to the fact that they lived "in the same neighborhood."

> Ms. Han knows she can call me at home anytime. We have that kind of relationship. I don't feel that way with all parents. My son has gone trick or treating with Brian's elder brother and we know each other out of school. We are in the same neighborhood.

Ms. Han seemed to be "more upbeat" and "very happy" in this latest IEP meeting comparing to two other previous IEP meetings that Ms. Gable had attended earlier last year. Ms. Gable made a comment on this noticeable difference that Ms. Han seemed to be "more comfortable," which might be the result of the fact that "Ms. Han has been working with the same people every year." As Ms. Gable described, "that was better" when Ms. Han had good personal relationships not only with her but also with other teachers involved in Brian's education. From the perspective of Ms. Gable, it was these personal relationships that had made Ms. Han comfortable in their parent-teacher communication. Furthermore, the established personal relationships seemed to make the communication successful.

Karen strongly emphasized the importance of having personal relationships with teachers who were involved in her son's education. She told me that she was a "people-oriented" person:

> 我喜歡去討好人家, 或者喜歡跟人家建立好的關係. 我不喜歡跟人家吵架或跟人家有不好的關係. 因為我知道, 這對我的孩子很有關係.

> I like to please people or build good relationships with others. I do not like to argue with others or to have bad relationships with others because I know relationships are greatly related to my child's education.

Compared to Ms. Wade, Karen felt much closer to Ms. Dee although she thought that she also had good relationships with both teachers. Karen stated that she had good personal relationships with Ms. Dee because of their "common goal" of promoting "community education" in the district. In addition, Karen believed that she got along with Ms. Dee because of their similar personalities. For her, this was the foundation to build personal relationships and lead to successful communication:

> 我們溝通的很好. We are friends.我想個性上, 我們也是滿合的, 比較 open的人, 都 pretty much也比較敢說的direct的人.
>
> We communicate with each other very well. We are friends. I think we get along quite well because our personalities matched each other. Both of us are very open. We are also pretty much direct when talking.

Karen described her gift-giving practices as a way to show her appreciation of teachers, which also helped maintain good personal relationships between her and the teachers. Karen told me that Ms. Wade informed her that Terry had one bathroom accident when he made a mess in the bathroom without cleaning it up. Although Karen felt embarrassed about Terry's behavior, she was also appreciative of what Ms. Wade had done to help solve this incident. To show her appreciation, Karen asked Terry to use the money that he made from working

at the bookstore to purchase chocolates as Valentine gifts for Ms. Wade and the janitor who had helped clean the bathroom.

Karen had also built a good relationship with the store manager of the bookstore where Terry had worked part-time since the summer of 2000. She would visit the bookstore occasionally and initiate conversations with the manager. Although Terry was a hard-worker and fulfilled his job responsibility, Karen believed that it was her personal relationships had helped secure his job at the bookstore. She told me that she felt appreciative when the store manager told her that they still had the budget to continue employing Terry for the next year even during the economy recession. She elaborated the significance of having a good relationship by stating, "Let me tell you the truth. Relationship 很重要 [is very important]."

Ms. Dee stated that most of her interactions with Karen were focused on their partnerships in the Parents Network. Therefore, their relationships existed on three separate yet related dimensions: (a) as teacher to parent at Success High School; (b) as colleagues in the Parents Network and the after school class; and (c) as special educators in the district.

For Ms. Dee, Karen was more than just a parent but also a colleague who was actively involved in the establishment of the Parents Network and

volunteered to offer the after school class. Moreover, Ms. Dee viewed Karen as an educator:

> I am thinking of her as an educator also because she is one. So there's kind of a language that she and I have in common and maybe some of the other parents don't.

With layers of relationships and interactions, Ms. Dee believed that she and Karen had established the personal connection. For her, "getting to know each other" was crucial to effective parent-teacher communication.

Ms. Wade had contacted Karen in late December of 2000, when Terry had "shown some signs of poor bathroom issues" which concerned her, so she contacted Karen. Ms. Wade believed their positive parent-teacher interaction had not only resolved this problem, but also further advanced their relationship. She elaborated:

> I was very appreciative of the fact that they bought me a gift afterward when we had the problem with the bathroom incident. They seem to be very appreciative of the work that I have done to help Terry to overcome the problem. So I think that was definitely a high point as far as the relationship was concerned.

Perceived Challenges Encountered during Parent-Teacher Communication

Four themes emerged from participants' narratives about interactions that were frustrating: (a) mismatched expectations of educational needs; (b) unstated assumptions about communication; (c) misread interactions and messages; and (d) communication barriers. The first theme arose from the content of communication

and the second theme described how participants' assumptions influenced the communication process. The third and fourth themes emerged from the communication process.

Mismatched Expectations of Educational Needs

Differing views of parents and teachers with respect to the students' educational needs concerning homework and curriculum apparently appeared across three families in this study. Notably, all three mothers sought an academic-oriented curriculum while their corresponding teachers concentrated on fostering the students' social and/or life skills. The third area of concern involved the social development of the students.

Homework. Ms. Han wanted Ms. Brown, Brian's fourth-grade GED teacher, to send home all learning materials that Brian missed when he attended the ASK program for one hour of reading and writing on a daily basis. Ms. Han was concerned and dissatisfied that Ms. Brown thought Brian was "unable" to finish certain kinds of homework. From Ms. Han's point of view, Ms. Brown doubted Brian's competency to complete the academic work in her class and refused to send the work home or to the tutor, who had been helping Brian with homework on a daily basis. Ms. Han described that Ms. Brown finally provided those kinds of homework after she had requested numerous times:

事實上證明我是對的, 他可以做. 不管我說什麼, 他們現在都做. 把材料全部送回家, 送給 tutor.

> It was proved that I was right at the end. He was able to do [those kinds of homework]. No matter what I say now, they [Ms. Brown and the new teacher assistant] will do it. They will send all homework home and to the tutor.

Ms. Han emphasized that her high level of education and years of raising and educating Brian had made her fully aware of Brian's strengths and limitations:

老師再怎麼講, 都沒有做父母的了解的深. 像我們受過高深教育, 我們這麼多年下來, 當然知道他的能力有多少, 什麼他可以做, 什麼他不可以做.

> The teacher would never be able to understand [Brian] as well as the parents. Like us, we had received higher education. After so many years of raising and educating Brian, we surely know at what level his ability is and what he can and cannot accomplish.

Although Ms. Brown had been sending home this "extra work" at the request of Ms. Han, she did not think it was "appropriate" for Brian. She emphasized that there was "a fine line" when working with Brian to make sure the academic expectations of him were "reasonable." For example, Ms. Brown thought that "writing complete sentences and paragraphs" rather than writing a five-page "persuasive paper" was a "reasonable" writing assignment for Brian. Furthermore, she did not think it was "reasonable" of her as a teacher to ask Brian's tutor to help him with this kind of writing, since she had a "certain way"

of teaching students how to write. Consequently, Ms. Brown made the decision to send home "worksheets and questions from the stories in the book." She elaborated her rationale:

> He needs to be working two grade levels below, maybe on the second grade reading level and working on some skills down there. That to me will be more beneficial for him than struggling through this hard fourth grade assignment that he is not ready to do. Just like making a kindergartner do multiplication.

Ms. Brown was concerned that Ms. Han's was "connected to her son" and seemed to overestimate Brian's readiness to complete certain academic work. Ms. Brown further argued that Brian's parents might hold a higher expectation on Brian's capability:

> It would be great if they [the parents] could accept the limitation of Brian and the capability, and just understand that [there] is going to be [a] time when he is below level and accept that.

Julie was concerned that not much homework was brought home when Tim first entered middle school. According to her, this was an indication that little learning was occurring at school:

> 中國人可能還是比較注重教[育], 其實還是希望讀書注重一點點. 美國人 maybe 並沒有這樣.
>
> Chinese people may put more emphasis on education. We still expect him [Tim] to work more on academic tasks. Maybe Americans do not emphasize education like we do.

Although Julie was dissatisfied with the insufficient amount of homework, she postulated possible reasons for no homework sent home:

> 我很不滿意. 但是我try to hold 我的feeling, 我try to 再看一看. 因為Tim, 就像transfer 到new school, new teacher什麼, 這些都會有問題, 你也不能說只是怪, 因為老師也需要時間對他, 知道他是什麼level, 他可以 push 到多大程度, 他可以做多少, 所以不hurt 他.
>
> I am very dissatisfied [with so little homework]. But I try. I also hold back my feelings. I try to wait and see. Because Tim has problems when he transfers to a new school or has a new teacher. You cannot just blame the teacher. Because the teacher also needs time to figure out at what level Tim is, to what extent he can be pushed, and how much [schoolwork] he will be able to do, it won't hurt him.

Julie's concerns about the lack of academic task for Tim were not relieved even after she visited the school. She found out that there was not much "schoolwork" in school either. She felt that Ms. Morgan should make more effort to "push up" Tim's learning by asking him to do more academic tasks. However, Julie stated that her Chinese cultural trait of being "ju jing" or being "restrained and cautious" made her hesitate to express her concerns about Tim's educational needs. Finally, Julie made the initiative to contact Ms. Morgan after the school had been in progress for two months:

> 我覺得那次跟她講以後, 我覺得很有效, 然後他 bring more homework, 而且很多的 reading 啦, 就是還有作業啊. After that 很明顯, 就是 next week, 他就很多 homework, 她就會讓他做多一點的 work.
>
> I think it's very effective after I talked with her [Ms. Morgan] about my

> concerns. He would bring more homework home, a lot of reading, and assignment. It's very obvious after that [talk with Ms. Morgan]. He had a lot of homework for the next week. She [Ms. Morgan] would let Tim do more work.

Receiving Tim's completed work from school had made Julie and her husband, Henry, satisfied with Tim's learning and Ms. Morgan's teaching. Julie further attributed Tim's progress to his increased amount of "homework," which allowed Tim to practice his academic skills more frequently.

Ms. Morgan did not realize that Tim's parents "want[ed] to see everything" that Tim had accomplished at school until they contacted her. She admitted:

> I haven't been sending home a lot of the work he's been doing. I wasn't sure like what they wanted to see. So they came in and said, 'We like to see Tim's work. Can we see what you're doing?'

In response to their request, Ms. Morgan started sending Tim's work samples, "That's when the daily notes started and homework assignments started."

Although Terry's English resource teacher did not participate in this study, the homework assigned by this teacher had concerned Karen. She thought this teacher was inexperienced in teaching exceptional students like Terry but was making efforts to "modify" for Terry. Karen commented on Terry's latest homework to write a paper titled "my future" by searching the internet:

> 所有 research paper 也要照著 MLS, 就是你寫 report 的時候, 你要 quote

> 從那些過來, 這些 research 東西. 他是從 internet research 過來的. I think it's good for him to expose but it's not practical.
>
> All research papers had to follow MLS format. When you were writing the report, you needed to quote where you obtained your data for the research paper. For example, he [Terry] had to provide information about where he searched on the internet. I think it's good for him to expose [to use internet] but it's not practical [to use MLS format].

In spite of feeling disappointed about following the certain format in writing the "research paper," Karen focused on the positive aspect of this homework, which was "functional" and "practical" in terms of topic and the exposure to use computer.

Curriculum. From talking to other school staff with whom she had a long-term relationship, Ms. Han found out that what was reported during the parent-teacher conference, such as modified curriculum, was not actually carried out in Ms. Brown's class. Learning that Brian was struggling to learn the same materials and take the same tests as his peers, Ms. Han concluded that Ms. Brown:

> 根本就不想要 Brian 在她的班上. 她就是要讓 parents frustrated, 然後 pull him out of class by ourselves.
>
> does not want Brian to be in her class. I think she wants to let parents feel frustrated. Then [we] will pull him [Brian] out of [her] class by ourselves.

Ms. Han said that both Ms. Brown and the SED teachers were revising their curriculum to meet Brian's needs after she had expressed her concerns. Again, Ms. Han was determined to exercise her parental knowledge about Brian's

educational needs to choose the most appropriate learning materials:

> 現在他們有送 modified 的教材回來, 我要求他們把 original 的教材一併送回來, 我們可以自己選擇, 那些適合, 那些不適合, 再讓 tutor 教他.
>
> Now they have been sending the modified curriculum home. I also asked them to send the original curriculum home so we can choose which are appropriate and which are inappropriate for Brian. Then, we can ask the tutor to teach him.

Although Ms. Brown did not address the issue about modified curriculum as raised by Ms. Han, she mentioned that Ms. Han was concerned about the curriculum in SED class and had called her at home to "make sure that I was giving Brian enough work in here [my class]." Ms. Brown stated that Ms. Han was worried that Brian would not get "enough academic work" and "keep up as much as he can with the other kids" when he went to the SED class for reading and writing. She told Ms. Han:

> What they [SED teachers] were doing in there [ASK classroom] is very appropriate and that I'm really sure that they are teaching. They are doing academics for Brian when he is in that class.

Ms. Brown commented that her promise to send the "extra work" given to class when Brian left for the ASK program had "pleased" Ms. Han since she did not receive any follow-up phone calls from Ms. Han.

Julie emphasized that even exceptional children's abilities varied depending on their levels, and she believed that Tim had "the ability to learn" and all he needed was to be "push[ed] up to learn" academically. When she learned

that Tim was still learning “independent skills” such as cooking in middle school, she was not only concerned but also dissatisfied:

> 我自己personal , 我會覺得這些 [cooking] a little much [too easy] to Tim, 因為自從他三年級就開始做這些, 他已經very good at 這些, 他在家裡自己cook egg什麼. 我會希望他working on more 他的test, 工作什麼的.
>
> Personally, I think these [independent skills such as cooking] were a little much [too easy] to Tim because he has started learning to do these [cooking] since he was in third grade. He is already very good at those skills. He can cook eggs by himself at home. I hope he can work more on tests and academic tasks.

Julie further hoped that the school curriculum, such as examples raised in class, could make connections to Tim’s interests. Thus, Tim would be more motivated to engage in learning. For example, she told Ms. Morgan that Tim liked “dolphin” in the hope that:

> 那她在學校可以, 那她就有個idea, maybe下一次舉例, 就會舉Tim喜歡的例子. 就是說, ‘oh, 他喜歡dolphin, 那我就講講dolphin什麼的.’
>
> At school, she [Ms. Morgan] might have the idea to use Tim’s interest when giving examples. She might think, ‘Oh, he likes dolphin. Then, I can talk about dolphin.’

Ms. Morgan regarded “middle school” as a vital stage both for the students with disabilities and their parents. She supported her conclusion by explaining that most parents began to realize and accept the fact that “there are some academic skills they [their children are] never gonna have.” Despite their limited academic development, Ms. Morgan viewed middle school as “trying

time" which allowed students to learn new concepts "because they still can go really far." However, she also emphasized that her job was to "really focus on the positive of what the kids can do and work on as much functional and independent living." Ms. Morgan further hoped parents could support and encourage their child try out their newly learned life skills at home. She provided the following examples:

> We were seeing a lot of progress with cooking at school. Maybe you should let him cook in the home or something. Or just you know we see him taking on more responsibility for job at school, why doesn't he has some more jobs at home and stuff like that?

From her experiences as a teacher, Karen knew that it was highly unlikely for a teacher to provide what she expected as an "individualized education" plan for her son. She was frustrated that the math resource teacher's use of "ditto paper" could not interest students in learning math. She mentioned that she wrote a note to the math resource teacher, "Do you think he [Terry] is good with this or do you think this fits for Terry? Can we have a meeting?" However, she heard nothing from the math teacher. Karen concluded:

> 那我也let go. 我也不生氣. Because I knew, he is not fit. Terry 也不見得 fit 那 class. 那老師也不見得懂得怎麼教他.
>
> I also let go [when the math teacher did not respond to my note]. I was not angry because I knew he [Terry] is not fit. Terry is not fit for that class while the teacher does not know how to teach Terry either.

Karen told me that she no longer held "high expectation" of Terry's academic performances like most Chinese families did with respect to their children's education. However, Karen believed that "reading is the tool for everything." Consequently, Karen and her husband had added "academic goals" for Terry even though Karen realized that the educational goals in high school mainly related to vocational skills. Because of her feeling of frustration with and awareness of the limitations of the school and teachers, Karen planned to try one year of "home schooling" with Terry to see "how much he can go."

Karen further emphasized the curriculum should not only be practical but also be related to the student's "experiences" and "interests." For example, she stated that she had planned to teach Terry do problem-solving in math by using an example generated from his daily life:

> 我從這裡到the bookstore [where Terry works], 我開車要開五分鐘, 那我走路要走五十分鐘, 那你覺得我走路是這個的幾倍, 那不就查的出來了嗎? Something like this. 你做division, 不是用這樣就可以了嗎.
>
> From here [Karen's home] to the bookstore [where Terry works], it takes me five minutes to drive and 50 minutes to walk. How many times are walking time to driving time? Isn't that easy for him to figure out the answer? [I will use] something like this [to teach him]. Why don't you use this approach to teach division?

Karen stated a "degree" was needed in order to help Terry "reach [his] dream" to be a weatherman. Knowing there was a special program for students with disabilities in the Goal Community College [GCC] in a local city, she

highlighted the importance of mastering certain "basic [academic] skills" in order to pass the examination to enter GCC. However, Karen concluded that "realistically and practically," she felt "content" about Terry's current job at the bookstore.

As Ms. Dee recalled that she had attended one house party held by Karen. During the house party, Karen approached and asked for an opinion from Ms. Dee about her plan to let Terry graduate. Because of her limited experience in teaching, Ms. Dee tried to redirect Karen to other people who might be more appropriate than her to provide the information:

> I recommended talking to the director of special ed. I kind of steered her in some other direction of people who could officially give her more words than I could.

In addition, Ms. Dee said she was also asking Karen some "sticky questions" as Karen talked about "what she wanted" for Terry rather than what Terry wanted for himself. Ms. Dee was further concerned that Karen seemed to be "interested in him [Terry] going to GCC and he is not interested." Consequently, she thought that Karen might need to consider other transitional options for Terry rather than post secondary education:

> I was talking about a lot of the other options. Because a lot of parents sometimes will see that as like, if he [the student] doesn't go to the local university, he can go to GCC. But there are so many other options that might be better for Terry, might be better for the family.

Ms. Dee further expressed her concern about Terry's readiness to graduate:

> I just think socially and emotionally, he is very ready for another couple years here even he doesn't have that [feeling], 'Why I am like this old and [I'm still in high school while] everybody is leaving?' He is not that old yet. And he just has friends here and I think he can use a lot [of] resources for a while longer.

During the parent-teacher conference, which Karen requested before the IEP meeting, Ms. Wade "discouraged" Karen's proposal for home schooling Terry because she thought "the socialization is important for Terry." She expected Terry to "have that interaction with his peers and with the other supervisors and teachers because he tends to be kind of a shy kid." She remembered telling Karen that "there are some class options that I made her [Karen] aware of that she hasn't thought about before that."

Social development. Ms. Brown could not overemphasize the importance of helping Brian foster appropriate social skills, which was "a big goal for Brian socially" and mainly done in the "special ed room [the ASK room]." Making note of Brian "having troubles this year" socially, Ms. Brown expressed what she thought Brian "really" needed:

> Communicating skills when he stands in line next to someone. How far away? You do not get up in their face. They're [SED teachers] really working on some skills that he really needs because he grows a little older the kids are being less and less accepting of him.

This issue surfaced when Brian started struggling with "social interactions." Ms. Brown stated that he was "obsessed with Kevin" and would call out Kevin's name in class. As stated by Ms. Brown, such behavior of Brian was

"bothering" Kevin whose mother had come in to express her concerns that she wanted " Brian to stay away from Kevin." With respect to the reactions and attitudes of the parents of Brian, Ms. Brown said:

> I think that it would be nice if they [Brian's parents] can stand back and say, 'Yes, we need to watch out for the other kids too.' Like this whole issue with Kevin, it would be nice if the mom and dad can say, can see from the other point of view, 'This is really hard for Kevin, too.' And see both sides. Not just their child.

From reading the school-home communication notebook, Ms. Brown felt that Ms. Han was beginning to understand "both side of the issues." When probed with the question how she came to the conclusion stated above, she told me that the SED staff, who had daily communication with Ms. Han, had come in and shared with her the outcome of their problem-solving with Ms. Han. However, Ms. Han did not mention such issues in our interviews.

In October 2001, Julie received a phone call from Ms. Morgan who told her that Terry had exhibited serious behaviors problems and might have to "out of school for 30 days." Feeling shocked, Julie could not stress more how much she wanted the school and the parents to work together to solve her son's behavioral problems. She stated that, starting six months ago, she began receiving more frequent phone calls from school asking her to pick up Tim because he was being "very difficult." Julie further elaborated that she was willing to accommodate by shortening Tim's schooling time such as sending him to school later or picking

him up earlier whenever it was necessary. However, she emphasized the priority should be placed on how to make Tim's schooling a success. She received an email from Ms. Morgan stating:

> 'Tim 在school裡 not very success.' 我說, 這個是nobody fault. 我從來沒有覺得, 這是學校的fault. 但是我說, 怎麼樣make it success, 就是要大家一起working on. Make it success.
>
> 'Tim was not very successful at school.' I think, 'It is nobody's fault.' I have never felt this is school's fault. But I think, to make it successful necessitates us working on this together to make it success[ful for Tim].

Julie felt shocked at the school's decision to keep Tim our of school for 30 days not only because it was delivered to her without any previous notice but also because of how the decision was made. She stated her concerns about suspending Tim by making an analogy to sentencing him:

> 如果Disability kids 坐牢就可以改變, 變成normal kids. 那我真的願意他去坐牢, 因為那是值得的. 可是對他, 他不懂, 到底這樣做有沒有意義.
>
> If kids with disabilities can turn into normal kids after doing time in jail, then I am really willing to let him go to jail because that is worth it. But for him, he does not understand. Will it make any sense to him if we do so [keep him out of school]?

Julie also wondered if this "huge decision" made by school was reasonable or had violated her child's right to attend public school when opportunities for collaboration were not provided. Julie declared that what she was fighting for were "child and parental rights."

> Tim 是比較tough的, 比較difficult, 比較challenge的. 像有些disability, 像retarded, 他們比較easier. 但是他們應該有same rights. 你並不能說, 'Oh. 他在學校裡不success, 我就要把他send回家.' 我說, 'That's why有這個special educa[tion]. That's why 有這個job.'
>
> Tim is tougher, more difficult, and more challenging. Like some other type of disability, for example, retarded [children with mental retardation], they are easier. But all of them should have the same rights. You cannot say, 'Oh. He is not successful at school so I will send him home.' I say, 'That's why we have special education [to provide services for exceptional children]. That's why we have the job for special education.'

Henry expressed his willingness to take Tim home when school called and told him that they needed "parental help." This usually happened when Tim was having a tantrum and had been screaming for a certain amount of time, which had a negative impact on the activities of nearby classrooms. According to Henry, he was particular dissatisfied and opposed to the "suspension" for the following two to three days after he had picked up his child from school based on two reasons:

> 第一, suspension 並沒有 help, 反而反作用. 因為 Tim 如果不能去學校, 他會很 frustrated. 他的情況也會 unstable. 第二, 如果每次都這樣, 就一直 suspension, 等於是 punish 家長, 學校也推卸責任.
>
> First, it would not help [solve the problem] by suspending him. It would lead to adverse reaction because Tim would be very frustrated if he could not go to school. His situation would become very unstable. Second, if school kept putting him in suspension every time, it was like punishing the parents. School also got to shirk their responsibility.

Henry's concerns were not fully relieved even after he had talked with Ms. Morgan who promised that it would not become a pattern for Tim's discipline

procedure.

Henry noticed that the terminology used by the current school, including suspension, removal, and homebound instruction, was changed to "possible placement including homebound" when he asked for a copy of the paperwork for the IEP meeting. Henry felt that if they did not prepare themselves by either consulting the local parent support group or by searching for resources about SED laws from the internet, they might have just agreed with school's suggestion like other parents who might not have had the information. Having knowledge of SED and related legal issues was perceived by Henry as critical to support his views and solutions with respect to his child's behavioral problems and educational placements, which differed from those of schools and teacher:

> 如果你自己不這樣做, 不保護自己, 自己不準備, 不利用法律, 就是說, 你就會被迫[接受]這學校[的提議].
>
> If you did not take actions to protect yourself, to prepare yourself, and to make use of the law, that is to say, you will be forced to [agree with] the school[']s suggestion].

Initially, both Henry and Julie were opposed to the school's proposal to shorten Tim's school hours. However, Tim had another major tantrum in school and damaged some school property the day before the scheduled IEP meeting, when Tim's placement was to be discussed and reviewed. Consequently, they

decided to agree with the temporary plan for Tim in the IEP meeting, a half-day schedule from 11am to 3:45pm.

During our last interview, Henry mentioned that he already foresaw that a "heated discussion" might be unavoidable during the next IEP meeting when Tim's placement would be reviewed to determine if he would be moved back to Ms. Morgan's class in the spring 2002 semester. In addition, Henry further pinpointed another topic for possible "heated discussion" when it came to the "gray area" on how to determine if Tim was able to go back to Ms. Morgan's classroom.

Ms. Morgan mentioned that she had collaborated with other staff on campus and from the district to "figure out a plan" for Tim, whose behaviors had became "pretty dangerous to himself and other people." Ms. Morgan stated how the placement for Tim had changed from "homebound placement" to a "half-day" schedule:

> Eventually, we have been suggesting a homebound placement for him and the parents did not want him to be at home. And so we re-met with our staff and came up with a half-day proposal, which is what they decided to go with. We don't feel he's capable of being here a whole day. It's too much pressure, too much stress on him. So we needed to come up a plan where he could just be here part of the day.

Ms. Morgan thought that the conflicts over Tim's disciplinary procedure were grounded in parents' lack of understanding of "the school dynamic," because they did not understand the procedures of how things were done in the

U.S. First of all, there was "not the same demands placed on Tim at home" and at school. Ms. Morgan defined demand as to "do school work" by following "a prescribed schedule," which seemed to be missing at Tim's house, after she worked with Tim at his house "on his removal."

According to Ms. Morgan, a second type of misunderstanding of "the school dynamic" on the parents' part was the negative impact of Tim's behaviors on other students in her class and the entire school:

> It's taking so much away from the other six children in the classroom. When we have to have two people with Tim at all time. Or I am in the middle of something and he's dangerous. I have to leave the other kids and make sure they are covered or find somebody. But their education is also being adversely affected by Tim's behavior.

Ms. Morgan further explained the school's rationale why they had to ask Tim not to come to school when they "were not prepared for him to come back," was misinterpreted by Henry as not wanting Tim in school:

> I spent all weekend putting the room [temporarily classroom prepared for Tim] together. On Monday when he came back [for the first day of his half-day schedule]. In about five seconds, he destroyed the room. And we needed time to get the room put back together. So [for] several days, he's been on administrative removal.

Unstated Assumptions about Communication

Ms. Han and Julie both encountered discontinued flow of communication with their children's new teachers. They both requested a conference with the new teachers and laid out their expectations with respect to information sharing about

their children's progress at school. Karen expressed her confusion about which teacher to contact regarding her son's education. Four out of the six participating teachers assumed that their parent-teacher communication with their counterparts went well when there was no question raised by the parents. One parent thought his child's behavior problems had lessened since there was a decline in communication from the teacher. As a whole, these issues concerning parent-teacher communication revolved around (a) information about school; (b) home life; and (c) interpretation of silence.

Information about school. Ms. Han had been using a notebook to maintain her communication with both the general and special education teachers of her son. She remembered that Ms. Lee, the new SED teacher, neither called for a parent-teacher meeting nor wrote in the notebook at the beginning. Ms. Han emphasized that she had waited about twenty days before she contacted Ms. Lee to request a meeting. During the meeting, she asked Ms. Lee:

> 我說, '我的兒子每天都有notebook啊, 我都沒有看到妳寫.' 她說, '我沒有時間寫notebook.' 我就問她, '為什麼沒有時間寫notebook, 別的老師都有.'
>
> I told her, 'My son has a notebook with him every day but I have never seen any of your comments.' She told me, 'I didn't have time to write in the notebook.' I asked her, 'Why didn't you have time to write in the notebook since other teachers manage to do so?'

Ms. Lee told her that she would rather spend more time working with students rather than writing in the notebook while they were in her classroom. Ms. Han accepted this explanation as reasonable. As a result, they started using emails as the new communication channel so that Ms. Lee could write emails to Ms. Han during after school hours.

Because of her teaching schedules, Ms. Lee described that "it's just so much easier" for her to write notes to parents after school hours. After the meeting initiated by Ms. Han, they started switching from writing in a notebook to using emails to maintain communication. Ms. Lee elaborated how email exchanges had facilitated her communication with Ms. Han:

> I never spoke to Brian's mom at all over the phone because we did it through email so much. We might write to each other like twice a day sometime. It's always at least once a day. And might be two or three times a day. So it's almost like we are having a conversation.

Julie told me that Tim always brought his daily schoolwork home when he was in elementary school. The first semester when her son entered middle school, Julie was very unsatisfied with the fact that "nothing [homework] bring[s] home" after the school had already been in progress for a month. Julie suspected that there might be "something wrong" and that Tim seemed to "learn less" when comparing his current amount of homework to the amount in elementary school. Getting "report" from Ms. Morgan stating classes including cooking and physical education that Tim was taking did not seem to meet Julie's needs for gaining

information about school activities. She further elaborated what she thought as an effective way of educating Tim:

> 我需要知道more detail. 因為你說, '我需要他learn 多一點.' 這個都不是很具體. 我覺得不是很有效. 對我來說, 我覺得有效, 我要叫他作業, 我覺得我需要把每天他做的的作業帶回來.
>
> I need to know more [in] detail. When you say, "I want him to learn more.' I don't think this is specific or effective. To me, the effective way [to help him learn] is to ask him to do homework. That's why I need him to bring home all schoolwork that he completed at school every day.

In addition to reviewing Tim's schoolwork, Julie regarded the information shared by all professionals during the annual IEP meeting as one way to gather "more school information." Julie stated that both she and her husband could not only "meet with all of Tim's teachers" but also find out what Tim was doing in classes other than Ms. Morgan's:

> 每次IEP meeting, 我覺得我收穫很大, 就是因為每個老師都會講很多很具體的, 就是Tim在這個individual 這些 class裡面的情況. 我很願意知道, 聽到這些他在學校. 所以對我personal 來說, 我還希望有多一點IEP meeting這些. Hopefully, 可以時間多一點.
>
> I always get a lot out of the IEP meeting because every teacher will talk about lots of specific things and situations when Tim is in their individual class[es]. I am very willing to know about these things and hear things about his progress in school. To me personally, I would hope to have more IEP meetings. Hopefully, the length of meeting could be longer.

Because of her working schedule and worries that Tim might behave differently because of her presence, Julie had never observed these classes.

Except Ms. Morgan and the speech therapist, Julie admitted that she did not know Tim's music and physical education teachers. Furthermore, Julie described the difficulties with contacting these subject teachers because their home numbers were not given. She thought that she needed to "respect" their choice of maintaining their privacy after school. Moreover, she was aware of the difficulty talking to teachers at school via the phone from her experiences of calling Ms. Morgan.

Julie was aware that she could ask for contact information for these teachers from Ms. Morgan if she wanted. Since Ms. Morgan was providing the information about other classes, Julie did not perceive the need as so important that she needed to call these teachers and talk to them directly, although she would prefer to know more detailed information.

Ms. Morgan admitted that her "communication was fairly limited at the beginning." Because of her uncertainty about how much communication Tim's parents would need, Ms. Morgan stated that she "wasn't really sending home a lot of work." Ms. Morgan stated that it took her a while "for each set of parents to figure out how much communication" they wanted:

> Like some parents if I sent them home a note everyday, they'll be like 'Why are you [sending the note home]? I don't need to know every minute.' But Tim's parents aren't like that. So they were the ones initially approached me and said, 'We need more communication.'

In addition to "daily report," Ms. Morgan also sent the "six-week progress notes" about Tim's progress in occupational therapy. After the annual IEP meeting in April 2001, Ms. Morgan commented that Julie and Henry seemed to have a "harder time" understanding "related services like speech and occupational therapy" compared to White parents. However, she thought that it was not "uncommon" for her students' parents "to not really understand what those people [related services staff] offer." However, Ms. Morgan stated that she could only provide "a general kind of statement" since she was not with Tim during his therapies. Although Ms. Morgan perceived that was her job to "facilitate" parents' understanding of the related services provided to Tim, she argued:

> But at the same time, his parents are more than welcome to get in direct contact with the speech person. I can help that but I don't need. I shouldn't be telling Tim's parents what he is doing in speech. That's not my job. That should be the speech therapist's job.

According to Karen, Ms. Wade was responsible for "vocational" rather than "educational" issues since she was not teaching any class. Consequently, when Karen had a problem, she usually talked to Ms. Dee who was her son's Home and Community class teacher. She usually contacted the teachers of the English or Math resource classes when she had concerns in those classes.

When Karen planned to request a meeting before the IEP meeting, she told me that she was not sure whom she should talk to about her concerns for Terry. When she found out that Ms. Dee would not be able to attend Terry's IEP

meeting, however, Karen requested a parent-teacher meeting with Ms. Wade to talk about her proposal to home school Terry.

Ms. Dee thought that Ms. Wade, Terry's folder teacher, should handle the "academic concerns" such as problems that occurred in Terry's resource or elective classes. Except for the issues she was responsible for, Ms. Dee would redirect all other academic concerns to Ms. Wade. However, Ms. Wade perceived her role as more "job-related" with respect to Terry's education. She explained that her main responsibilities were to supervise Terry at work and:

> To be in contact with his supervisors and make sure things are going smoothly. And if there's any issues I just go between Terry and the manager at the bookstore.

Home life. After years of dealing with different schools and teachers, Julie pinpointed that being "zhu dong," or "proactive," as one of the key changes in her characters in order to benefit her son's education. From the viewpoint of Julie, she had transformed from passively responding to negative phone calls from school to becoming "zhu dong," or "proactive," in sharing information from home with the teacher. According to her, changes in Tim's medication were the most often shared information with Ms. Morgan. By being "zhu dong," Julie shared her home observations of Tim's behavioral changes with Ms. Morgan while asking Ms. Morgan to monitor whether Tim behaved differently in school when taking

new medicine. She stressed that timely communication with teacher was extremely important when Tim began taking new medicine.

In contrast to Julie, Ms. Morgan stated that she did not feel she had two-way communication with Tim's parents. She was seldom informed by his parents about issues such as changes in medication and family situation, which would have a negative impact on Tim's behaviors at school. Feeling uncertain about Tim's behavior pattern changes, she said:

> I don't feel like I always get a lot from their side. I don't always know what's going on with Tim. They're changing his medicine. And I didn't know. And that's really a big deal for the teacher. Because Tim can be all of sudden he's doing something that I don't know why he is doing it.

In addition to feeling uninformed of contributing factors from home to Tim's behavior changes in school, Ms. Morgan also felt confused as to why Tim's parents had such different communicative behaviors in person and through email. During meetings, they provided "a lot of information" but she did not "always get responses to the emails" that she sent to them. Ms. Morgan acknowledged that she did not "need to know everything that goes on at home" and she respected parents' choice to provide only a certain amount of information. She was also concerned that she might "invade" their home life by asking parents for further detailed information:

> It would be nice if Tim's parents gave just a little bit more information about stuff. Because that's consistently how they've been, I am a little bit

> uncomfortable to invade or to press them. Because that's all they want to communicate to me. Different people tell you different amount of things. I just try to respect when they give me information and they are just telling me like smaller bits of stuff.

Ms. Morgan mentioned that on one occasion, she decided to ask follow-up question because she was wondering if they had made any medication changes after they visited the doctor:

> And he was out for like two or three days so I emailed them I said, we miss Tim. How did the doctor's appointment go? The email I got back was the appointment was fine. Well. I needed like, 'What happened in the doctor's appointment. What did the neurologist say? Did you change his medicine?' In the next email I had to say. 'Well. I am glad it was a good doctor's appointment but I need to know...'

However, Ms. Morgan still felt trapped in situations as to whether or not follow-up questions should be raised.

Interpreting silence. Ms. Lee did not perceive "any challenges" in her communication with the family. However, she was concerned if the parents were constraining themselves from expressing their dissatisfaction with her or the program:

> I do kind of worry about is that they are holding back for the sake of not wanting to maybe hurt my feelings, or push me too hard. I'm always wondering if they do have some concerns about how I teach.

Ms. Lee postulated that her concerns seemed to be unwarranted due to Ms. Han's positive comments about Brian's progress:

> She really hasn't criticized my teaching or something. So I think things are going OK. I think, I hope she is liking how I do things. If not, I would like her to tell me.

From the perspective of Ms. Gable, the parents and she had a shared understanding about Brian's learning needs because his mother had "verbalized" her expectations during their conversations. Ms. Gable said Ms. Han really wanted Brian to be able to have appropriate social interactions with his peers. In addition, "there haven't been any complaints" from parents as stated by Ms. Gable.

She described the parent-teacher communication process as "too many cooks in the kitchen" which had facilitated as well as complicated the process. Sometimes, she was concerned if communication was "missed," although she and the SED staff made sure the information was delivered to Ms. Han either through the notebook or by phone calls. She assumed her communication with Ms. Han was "working" because she thought that they both would not hesitate to contact each other:

> If there's a problem, Ms. Han will come to me and if I have a problem, I would go to Ms. Han. We correspond to the notebook and they [SED staff] take care of it. And I am assuming it's working.

Because Ms. Morgan felt that Tim's parents were less likely to volunteer information over email, she worried whether she was providing the information that they wanted to know. Consequently, Ms. Morgan postulated her major

assumption about the communication breakdown when there was no email response from the parents:

> So I assume they are getting it and I assume they are reading it. I assume everything is OK because they haven't told me it's not. I don't really get a lot [of responses from them]. So I assume, because I haven't heard back from them or said that what I was providing them was not what they want.

Ms. Morgan sometimes doubted whether the parents understood reports presented by her and the related service personnel during the IEP meetings since they seemed to ask questions regarding issues that had just been explained. However, she admitted that she tended to assume that Tim's parents understood everything and were "OK" with the information she provided in "the six-week progress report" since "they have never asked, what is Tim doing during OT?" and "they have never contacted" those therapists who provided these related services to Tim.

In addition, she was constantly unable to determine if Tim' parents understood everything in their conversations, she presumed that her communication with the family was "fine" because they never had any major conflicts:

> At the same time, if they are not asking me questions, then I don't need to press it. You know I don't want to treat them like they don't understand cause they do understand everything.

In the mid-fall semester of 2001, Ms. Morgan was sending emails to Henry about Tim's escalated problematic behaviors at school and was not getting any response, as usual. Neither Ms. Morgan nor Tim's parents realized that there was a breakdown of their email exchanges until Ms. Morgan asked Tim's parents, who came to school to pick Tim up. Actually, it turned out that Ms. Morgan had been sending her emails to an incorrect email address without realizing it since none of these emails were returned during "these six weeks." Routinely, she assumed:

> I wasn't getting a response from them. They were assuming everything was OK. I was just assuming that they just weren't responding to me.

Henry mentioned that the daily emails from Ms. Morgan had gradually declined from late spring semester of 2001 when Tim demonstrated behaviors in the late spring semester which were considered to be threats to school safety, such as throwing objects and knocking down a bookcase. During that period of time, Henry received more and more school phone calls asking him to take his son home. From the perspective of Henry, he thought whenever there was any news from school, it always seemed to be "bad news." He further stated that he was "kind of happy with no news" when he received neither phone calls nor emails from school or Ms. Morgan:

> I guess the first thing is if they don't call us in the middle of the day, so he is kind of OK. So we are kind of become ready for this kind of phone calls. Lately we assume if we don't get email from, we don't hear anything from

> Ms. Morgan, then I guess he is OK, kind of OK. It becomes no news is good news.

Two interpretations were formed by Henry to explain the decline in school contact. First, Henry recognized the possibility that Ms. Morgan might become "reactive" to their emails:

> Reactive means if we send her email, she probably responds. If we don't send, she probably [does not send email]. She did not explain, we did not ask for explanation. It's just kind of a matter of fact there're just not many emails. Every special education teacher's responsible for maybe seven to eight special kids, there are [is] quite a lot of time [needed]. So it's understandable.

Like his wife, Henry acknowledged the limitation of a classroom teacher who might "become less proactive" when she had so many students who needed her attention. Therefore, Henry believed the decline of email exchanges with Ms. Morgan was the result of his not sending emails to Ms. Morgan and Ms. Morgan's not emailing to him. However, he told me that he and his wife would not hesitate to send emails whenever they had questions.

Second, he assumed that Tim was doing well at school when he did not receive any information from the school or Ms. Morgan. This assumption was based on a previous instance when his son was doing better at school, and the frequency of parent-teacher communication had decreased. Guided by the assumption, Henry did not perceive a need to initiate the email exchange.

After the phone call about the unexpected changes of Tim's placement, Henry felt that the "phone and email communications haven't been changed." In fact, the miscommunication through emails had made both the school and the parents become more proactive in terms of initiating and maintaining communication:

> 由於大家都有切身利益在那裡, 他們有比較主動一些. 他們有理由, 有動力要說服我們. 那我們也有原因, 要達到我們的一些要求. 所以大家都比較主動一些.
>
> Because of the direct interests, both of us are more proactive to communicate. They have become more proactive because they have their reason and motive to persuade [us to agree with the new placement]. And we also have our reason to pursue our demands [for best placement for Tim]. As a result, both of us are more proactive.

As Henry thought through the communication process over this incident of changing placement, he believed that both parties should have taken actions to stop the decline of communication. Moreover, he emphasized that it was their responsibility as parents to initiate communication when they started noticing the decline of emails from Ms. Morgan.

Although Ms. Wade identified "frequent communication" and "easy access" as two of the key factors to effective parent-teacher communication, she also believed that it should become less frequent as students entered high school for the sake of their privacy and independence. She expected parents to contact

teachers on a needed basis "if there's a concern they should act immediately and in support of the teacher as a team."

Misread Interactions and Messages

There was a shared experience of feeling ambivalent among these three participating mothers regarding explicitly voicing their concerns or opinions, which might be in conflict with those of the involved teachers. With implicit agenda in mind, the mothers adopted an indirect communication style to successfully avoid unwanted outcome of damaging the relationships with the teachers and secure the desired result of meeting their needs. Consequently, these teachers were satisfied with their parent-teacher interactions without realizing these mothers' hidden messages.

Only one teacher, Ms. Morgan, adopted such style of indirect communication, which made the mother, Julie, misread her message. One teacher, Ms. Brown, described the misunderstanding between her and the parent, Ms. Han. However, Ms. Han's never mentioned this incident during our conversations.

Parent-Initiated communication. Feeling disappointed and angry about the "laziness" of the previous ASK teacher, Ms. Han informed Ms. Lee of her expectations by listing what was not accomplished by the former ASK teacher, which was exactly what she expected from a teacher:

不要像那個老師, 沒事就把孩子堆在一邊, 讓他去玩那些不知道什麼東西, 也不教他. 孩子每一個禮拜是有一篇作文寫出來, 讓我看看孩子的作文進步的程度. 把我的expectation都講出來, 我希望我的孩子在妳的班上能夠得到什麼樣的照顧.

Do not repeat what Brian's [previous ASK] teacher did. His previous teacher did nothing but let students stayed in there and played with things that were unknown to them. She did not teach him anything either. My son needed to write a composition every week so I could check on his progress in composition. I just told her what my expectations were and what kind of certain assistance that I wanted my child to have in her class.

During this meeting initiated by Ms. Han, she stated the purpose of initiating the meeting was to cultivate a shared understanding, which also helped maintain the positive relationships:

你把事情都講得很清楚. 就是open, 就是open up先把你想的講清楚, 你不要到時候事情發生了, 再講, 就扯破關係. 所有事情都beforehand.

You had to state everything very clearly. Just be open and open up to tell her what was on your mind first. You should not wait until something bad happened. When you told her at that time, the relationships would be ruined. Everything should be [communicated] beforehand.

Ms. Han further told me that if Ms. Lee did not put their discussion into actions within one month, she would make her complaint to the principal.

Ms. Lee viewed this meeting requested by Ms. Han as the most positive communication she had with Ms. Han. Ms. Lee recalled that Ms. Han "did not want to repeat what happened last semester. So she wrote out a lot of things. And she explained a lot of things that happened" last semester.

Ms. Lee highlighted two positive aspects of this communication. First, Ms. Han took the opportunity to verbalize her concerns and expectations of her as the SED teacher, and of the ASK program. Second, she thought that Ms. Han seemed to show her trust when she began sharing information about what happened at home. Consequently, Ms. Lee believed that she and the mother had " a strong relationship in terms of communication." She elaborated her statement:

> Like she will trust me enough to ask me for maybe advice, suggestions on how to work with Brian at home. Maybe getting him to do his homework more and working on his self-esteem. So it seems like that she trusts me to tell me what's going on at home.

As stated in an aforementioned section, Julie was dissatisfied about little to no homework being sent home. Julie wondered if Ms. Morgan might never send Tim's homework home if she did not make the request. She speculated about one possible explanation:

> Maybe 老師也會偷懶, 就是說, '我不需要send 回來, 我就能這樣, 不做什麼, 也沒關係.' Hopefully, 不是這樣.
>
> Maybe the teacher was lazy and thinking, 'Because I don't need to send homework home, I can do nothing and get away with it.' Hopefully, it's not like this.

Feeling ambivalent to ask Ms. Morgan how many academic tasks were done by Tim at school, Julie posed her questions to Ms. Morgan "indirectly" when she went to school. First, she speculated if it was "difficult" to ask Tim to

do academic tasks in class. Second, Julie told me how she expressed her concerns indirectly:

> 我希望他把work拿回來, 我希望知道他在什麼level裡面, 學校裡的 work. 然後這樣的話, 我自己家裡面的homework可以 working together. 我想需要了解學校, 他在做什麼, 什麼樣的work, what type, what level 的這種math, language. 我說這樣我可以幫他一起做.
>
> I hope he can take [school] work home. I want to know at what level he is as to schoolwork. As a result, I can assign him to do homework, which will be coordinated with the school curriculum. I told her that I want to know what work, what type, and what level in subjects of math and language [arts] Tim is doing at school. I told her that I would be able to help him do homework [if I knew all this information].

Ms. Morgan viewed Tim's parents as "concerned and involved" parents. During the parent-initiated meeting, Ms. Morgan recalled that Tim's parents told her that they "liked to see Tim's work" for the purpose of "going over" what was taught in class. "Compared to other parents of her students, Ms. Morgan described that that Tim's parents seemed to be "more interested in exactly what work he is doing and having that sent home."

Learning through her negative experiences of interacting with Terry's prior schools and teachers, Karen told me that she had learned to prevent any "conflicts" from occurring:

> 通常跟老師互動的時候, 就是儘量我positive, 然後儘量focus我們要的是什麼. 我知道他們做不到的, 我不會去要求.

> When interacting with teachers, I do my best to remain positive [about their efforts] and try to focus on what we want. I will not demand services that they were unable to provide.

For example, Karen recognized that "vocational" rather than "educational" goals were the focal points of high school education. She told me that she had neither much "expectation" nor "fear" about Terry's coming IEP meeting in April 2001:

> 我覺得vocational很好, 我很高興, 他們也很高興. 而這是他的goal. 那academic 的goal是我們自己父母加的. 因為他們都不太重視這個, 所以我也不去講那些.
>
> I think his vocational goal [current job at bookstore] is good. I am happy with Terry's vocational goal, so are they. Regarding the academic goal, we made the request to add it [in his IEP]. Because they don't emphasize academics, I don't talk about that.

Karen's tendency to avoid conflicts was reflected in her final decision to let Terry stay at Success High School one more year:

> 其實我還給她一個favor, 我把他拉出來就可以, 可是他們不要他出來, 因為要budget. 他們要錢. 多一個, 多一個錢. 所以, 我都知道啊. 所以我就是買她的面子, 因為director是以前 Terry's 的老師, 就等於是我的老闆, 所以我就給她一個面子. 我不去碰那一點.
>
> In fact, I am doing her [director of SED in Star school district] a favor. I can just pull him [Terry] out from school. They [school and district staff] do not want him to graduate because of the budget. They want the funding. If they can have one more student [receiving SED], they can have more funding. I know all about this. I am saving the face of the director, who was Terry's former teacher [in high school]. She is also my boss.

> Therefore, I just put on a face for her and do her a favor. I will not touch that area [about graduating Terry].

In fact, Karen did not mention the topic related to home schooling during Terry's annual IEP meeting. Instead, she focused on what school had accomplished with regard to assisting Terry's job at the bookstore.

Even though she had never attended Terry's IEP meeting nor had she had a parent-teacher conference with Karen, Ms. Dee considered the "graduation talk" as the most successful communication she had with Karen. As described in the previous section, Ms. Dee recommended that Karen talk to the director of the SED in the district concerning Terry's graduation. When Karen acted on her recommendation as a result of their talk, Ms. Dee viewed their talk as a positive outcome:

> It was productive, I thought. She did go on to talk to other people who kind of steered her in the direction I wanted to see them [Karen and Terry] go. I mean I was glad to see that he [Terry] would stay.

Ms. Wade considered the meeting at Karen's request a "positive" one because she honored Karen's request by providing her with "honest opinion." Ms. Wade thought Karen was "shying away" from her own proposal to home-school Terry at the end of meeting. Moreover, Karen seemed "very agreeable" to the suggestion she had offered. Giving emphasis to being honest with each other, Ms. Wade added:

> She just really wanted my opinion, which was what I gave her. And that was the whole purpose of the meeting. So I think it went according to what she wanted to get out of it.

Tim's medication changes. Julie described Ms. Morgan as a "friendly" teacher when she not only provided information about Tim's behavior changes in school but also showed her personal interest of caring Tim:

> 我anytime去學校, 我會碰到她. 我覺得她還是很person[al], 很friendly, 就是說. '最近這個禮拜, 都很不好. 有沒有在家裡, 有什麼difference啊, 有沒有medicine有什麼原則上 change啊.'
>
> Anytime I would see her when I went to school, she was very person[al] and very friendly. [By telling me,] 'Tim was not doing well during this week. Is there any difference at home? Is there any medicine change?'

After finding out about those changes with the medicine, Ms. Morgan offered to send home weekly "graphs of his [Tim's] different behaviors that were charted" so she could monitor if there was any changes in Tim's medication. Indirectly, she told the parents that they could bring those graphs to the doctor:

> And so that was a really good timer. But I told them that, 'you can't change the medicine or else all the data I'm keeping is not going to work.'

Ms. Morgan commented that her suggestion had "worked out really well," which prevented any medication changes. However, she was still concerned and had to "check with them every once in a while to make sure that they are not changing the medicine."

The cultural luncheon. Ms. Brown mentioned one incident that she believed had resulted from a "communication barrier between the cultures." In late September, there was "a heritage luncheon" when students brought ethnic food and their parents were invited to join them for lunch. The classroom was very "crowded" because "all the parents" were there and all the desks were "spread out," surrounded by extra chairs for each student's parents. She remembered that she kept inviting the parents to sit down with Brian while she was talking with all the other parents in the classroom:

> And they kept saying, no, we don't want to eat. We don't want. And they stood in the kind of to the side of the room. And so Brian was sitting by himself because the chairs were for the parents. And all the desks were spread out.

Not until "the special ed people came in" to talk to her later that day did Ms. Brown realize that Ms. Han had called the SED classroom to express her concerns that Ms. Brown "was isolating Brian." Ms. Brown argued:

> I was very upset about that. Yes, he was by himself but it was because they [Brain's parents] wouldn't come and sit with him. All the other kids were by themselves too, but they had parents sitting there. And so I don't know if it's a cultural thing. They didn't wanna come and sit with him. But they stood in the corner and didn't want to participate. I think it made Brian uncomfortable cause he knew he was alone.

Although Ms. Brown was still uncertain what happened at the luncheon, she postulated some possible explanations. For example, the parents were not

hungry or they might be busy taking pictures of the class. She went on her speculations about the parents' behaviors:

> And then as the minutes went by, they never went and sat with Brian. That's when I thought maybe they felt uncomfortable. And I thought for a moment about that maybe it has something to do with the culture. Maybe it doesn't have anything to do with culture. They just didn't want to sit. Ms. Brown thought of another plausible explanation as soon as she had

told me the above stated interpretations in our interview. She remembered having heard Ms. Han mention several times that "Brian doesn't want her here." Ms. Brown had seen Brian tell his mother "go" because he was "not used to seeing her at school."

> I know that he [Brian] gets upset when she [Ms. Han] is here sometimes. So perhaps on that day, she was just thinking that Brian didn't want her with him. Maybe that was it. And she was trying to stand back because he doesn't want her there.

Ms. Brown mentioned that she had never talked to Ms. Han about what happened in luncheon "personally" after she had explained her point of view to the SED staff. Ms. Brown stated that neither herself nor Ms. Han had mentioned this incident when they met again. When I asked if she had tried to talk to Ms. Han about this incident, Ms. Brown said, "I guess by the time I saw her [Ms. Han] again, I wasn't thinking about it. Or several weeks have passed and it was just past the moment."

Communication Barriers

In addition to the content of communication creating challenges for teachers and parents, both groups also encountered difficulties that were the results of communication styles and perceived language barriers.

Although there was no perceived "real challenge" in her communication with Ms. Han, Ms. Gable mentioned that a "language barrier" seemed to play a role in their written communication:

> Maybe a couple of times, when they've [the parents] written something in the spiral notebook, I don't always have a clear understanding of what she [Ms. Han] is asking for. I think that's more of a language pro[blem] where I am not sure what she is asking. Maybe the way something is worded.

Ms. Gable said such a challenge resulting from a "language barrier" had only occurred once or twice and she could not think of any specific example. Usually, Ms. Gable would discuss with the teaching assistants and try to determine what Ms. Han meant. She commented that their communication was fine after she asked Ms. Han for clarification.

From Ms. Brown's perspective, Ms. Han tended to express her concerns with a third party. Two such events included the "extra work" and "the cultural luncheon." She added:

> Whenever she [Ms. Han] is unhappy about something in here [the GED class], she calls them [SED class]. And whenever she is unhappy about something in there, she calls me. I notice that a little bit. That she doesn't come directly to the person that she has a problem with.

Another communication barrier raised by Ms. Brown was that there were "so many of us " maintaining the communication with Ms. Han. Consequently, she was concerned "how much is my responsibility as his [Brian's] teacher to call" his parents. Ms. Brown stated that "most" of her communication with Ms. Han went through the SED staff. Moreover, she felt that Ms. Han's choice of writing in the notebook as the main communication channel rather than using email seemed to remove opportunities of maintaining regular personal communication. However, for Ms. Brown, email was the "best way" to communicate with most of her parents.

In addition to the confusion over whose responsibility to contact Ms. Han, she further wrestled with the notion of whether she should have more frequent personal contacts with Ms. Han because of Brian's special needs when she tried to "make it equal for" all students and parents. She stated that she would call the parents "if there's a particular issue" with their children and that "included Brian." She provided her rationale:

> I don't talk to everybody else's parents twice a week. I really have to look at both sides of the coin and say, as long as Brian is getting his needs met and he has his support of special ed, if they are providing that. Maybe that's OK.

Language was not considered as one of the major roadblocks to her communication with teachers, however, Julie was aware of the need to be "very clear with your teacher" when expressing concerns:

特別是外國人, 我覺得maybe 你的English not native, 我覺得我們是一般來說, 可以讓她unders[tand], 但是你要make sure她understand 你的 concern. 我覺得你是外國人, 就是更加, 不要有就是communication方面的misunderstanding.

Particularly for foreigners, I think that maybe your English is not native[-like]. Generally speaking, I think we can make her understand. But you have to make sure that she understand[s] your concern. I think you as a foreigner, you have to be more [careful] not to create misunderstandings in your communication.

Although misunderstanding happened in her communication with Ms. Morgan, Julie could not provide any examples.

Concerning the conflicts about Tim's changes of school hours and placement, Julie described that she was "very surprised and shocked" because there was "not any signal" until she got the phone call from Ms. Morgan:

一開始只是一點點的violence, 學校沒有提供具體的說明. Teachers 也沒有具體的辦法. 今天才通知我, 要將 Tim suspend 30 天, 學校要 30天來 deal with this [Tim's problems].

At the beginning, there were just minor violent behaviors. The school has never provided specific statements and explanations. Teachers didn't have specific solutions either. They just informed me today that they are going to suspend Tim for thirty days. The school said that they need thirty days to deal with this [Tim's problems].

Like his wife, Henry did not perceive language as a barrier to his communication with the school or teachers. Henry emphasized that he would "rather deal with Americans" compared to Chinese Americans in his daily life. He

explained his rationale by telling that "I feel more comfortable actually. I'm not trying to say, 'Oh. I'm American citizen.' It just feels more comfortable. I mean even language-wise."

As shocked as Julie, Henry found it unacceptable when Ms. Morgan called and informed them of the school's decision about the disciplinary procedures for Tim's behaviors. Henry recalled that the school changed around the terminology among "out of school for thirty days," "suspension," and "removal" during their conversations. However, the school proposed "possible placement including homebound" instruction as one of the agendas to be discussed during the IEP meeting when Henry requested for the IEP paperwork to be sent home. Consequently, he concluded that if they did not "prepare" themselves with relevant information about SED, they might have to accept the school's suggestions of "suspension or even homebound instruction" without ensuring their parental rights.

"Language barrier" was the main concern mentioned by Ms. Morgan throughout her narratives describing her communication with Tim's parents. She summarized:

> They say things and I don't understand exactly what they mean. And so I don't know if they always understand what I say, what I mean.

To further explain what Ms. Morgan perceived as "language barrier," a portrayal of (a) parents' difficulty in verbal expression; (b) parents' difficulty in

comprehending SED term; (c) parents' difficulty in understanding slang expression; (d) parents' communication style differences; and (e) showing respect or repeat to the parents is presented below.

Perceived parents' difficulty in verbal expression. Ms. Morgan found that Tim's parents seemed to be struggling with finding "the word in English that they are trying to say" at times. As a result, she was uncertain if she understood their points:

> I just think it's kind of like maybe a loss of words for them. So sometimes instead of using like one word, they sort of explain around it. And I am not always sure that I understand exactly what they try to get across.

Accordingly, it became more challenging for Ms. Morgan to understand the parents over the phone. Ms. Morgan commented that usually Julie was able to get her points across and she was able to understand her even though she "need[ed] a lot of clarification" from Julie. Being unable to observe the parents' nonverbal communicative behaviors, such as facial expressions, had caused difficulties in her understanding of Julie during phone conversations. Consequently, Ms. Morgan felt that if she "got most

of it, that was OK" even though she was unsure if she understood everything that was said in their phone conversations.

Perceived parents' difficulty in comprehending special education terms. Ms. Morgan thought the use of a "whole bunch of different terms" in SED seemed

to be another source of confusion for Julie and Henry. From the perspective of Ms. Morgan, these terms also created difficulties for the parents in comprehending information presented during the IEP meeting. As described in a previous section, Ms. Morgan thought that they seemed to have a "harder time" understanding "related services like speech and occupational therapy" compared to European American parents.

Again, Ms. Morgan perceived that Tim's parents had difficulty in understanding jargon used in the field of SED. On the occasion of explaining Tim's "behavior plan" to Henry, Ms. Morgan also found that Henry was asking for clarification about the information she just had told him:

> I said, 'Tim doesn't follow a regular ed discipline program because it has… On his behavior plan, there are three places you can mark: Yes, they need to follow regular behavior plan. Yes, they can follow but with some modifications. Or no, they don't follow it. And Tim has no, they don't follow it.' And so I was explaining, going on and on. He [Henry] goes, 'Wait, what do you mean that Tim doesn't follow regular discipline plan.' And so I was like, 'Tim is not a regular ed student. He is a special ed student. It's said on his behavior plan.' So I'm going over things again. I don't know if it's the terminology thing, like regular behavior plan versus special ed plan.

When school and district staff "was trying to figure out what rules" and how these rules could apply to disciplining Tim for his behavioral problems, Ms. Morgan thought that different terminology used by different staff had further confused the parents. After Tim had a severe tantrum and destroyed the school property, the staff needed time to reorganize the classroom and asked the parents

to keep Tim at home. Consequently, the principal had tried to "put him [Tim] on a ten-day leave," which was shorted to three days. She explained:

> Tim is not on a regular ed discipline plan. He doesn't actually get suspended. He gets administratively removed. People have used the wrong terminology to the parents. It's been very confusing. And I think it's hard for the parents.

In fact, during the process of solving Tim's behavior issues, Ms. Morgan had asked other school personnel inform the parents of the school's decision about the discipline procedures. She was concerned that her "strong relationship" with the family and their "trust" in her would be shattered if she had to be the one telling them that their child was under "administrative removal." However, it became a "communication disaster" as a result of insufficient coordination among professionals from school and the school district. Noticing that it had been "very overwhelming for the parents" to hear different information delivered by different school staff, Ms. Morgan decided to be "the central person to communicate" by delivering school decisions to parents. She commented that "helped a lot" and felt that they were all now "on the right path."

Perceived parents' difficulty in understanding slang expression. Ms. Morgan was greatly concerned that the communication process would be further complicated by adding cultural factors to the language barriers. She supported her view by providing one example in which Henry apparently had difficulty understanding "giddy" which was used in one of the IEP meetings:

> The dad was like, 'What is giddy?' Well. I am imagining that he doesn't what a giddy is because that's not a word. It's a slang. Kind of language term. And so stuff like that. It's an English-Chinese thing with the word, giddy. And I tend to explain things over and over. We were giving like ten different words that mean giddy. And they [Tim's parents] are like, 'Ok, I got it.'

Perceived parents' communication style differences. As Ms. Morgan described the challenges of the email communication with Tim' parents, she recognized there was a pattern from their responses to her emails. She commented that they usually replied to her emails whenever she asked "a direct question." However, Ms. Morgan chose not to ask questions in her emails because she did not want the parents to "feel like they have to respond to every email."

Comparing them with the European American parents of her other students, Ms. Morgan noticed that Tim's parents were less likely to provide the contextual information "voluntarily" as a result of "language barrier." She described one such example that happened when they brought Tim to school one day and told her that "we had a hard morning." Not knowing what they meant by "hard morning," Ms. Morgan consistently attributed the lack of further information to their inability to describe what happened:

> I think it is sometimes some of the language. I might press another parent or it might come more natural to another parents to maybe give me some of other information. When the other parents will come in and [say] 'We had a terrible morning and this was what happened and da da da da.' Tim's parents just come and go, 'We had a hard morning.'

Respect or repeat. Ms. Morgan's awareness of their language difficulties and her desire to be respectful of Tim's parents actually hindered her communication with them. According to Ms. Morgan, her biggest challenge was whether she should "over-explain something because their English isn't as good" or whether she should be respectful by not "keep[ing] explaining things" since they were "very intelligent people." She explained her rationale because Tim's parents were "very knowledgeable about their rights and autism."

In addition, Ms. Morgan was concerned that she might be making a mistake, which was similar to those commonly made by people when talking to an English language learner:

> That's like someone who speaks different language, and people tend to speak louder to them. They shout at you like that's gonna help. I see that so often. People are like, 'Why are you shouting at me? Just because I speak different [language] or maybe my English isn't as good, you don't have to shout it.' That's how I feel sometimes. I don't want them to think, 'Why does she keep explaining this to us? We get it.' So that has been the biggest thing this year. I just do not want them to think that I think any less of them because sometimes there is a language barrier.

Perceptions of Components For Effective Parent-Teacher Communication

This section addresses the second research question, which explored teachers' and parents' perceptions about the components needed for communication to be effective. As participants recalled from their interaction experiences, they relayed a number of components that they thought would be

needed in effective communication. These components consisted of (a) building personal relationships; (b) maintaining two-way communication; (c) teachers' availability to parents as a priority; (d) increasing cultural sensitivity; and (e) developing the characteristics of a good communicator.

Building Personal Relationships

Establishing relationships remained to be the focus of interaction for parents. Three out of six teachers also highlighted personal relationships as the foundation for positive parent-teacher communication. Strategies utilized to forge relationships with either home or school including (a) expression of appreciation; (b) initiation of personal conversation; and (c) provision of access are discussed.

Expression of appreciation. As stated earlier, Ms. Han avoided ruining parent-teacher relationship by being proactive in having dialogues with teachers about parental expectations for her child and for the teachers. From her view, when the teachers shared the same understanding with her, the parent-teacher relationships were maintained. Ms. Han had utilized two strategies to further advance this relationship to a personal one with all involved teachers. For Ms. Han, her first strategy was to "show appreciation" by practicing gift-giving to involved teaching staff during special occasions such as Christmas. Recognizing teachers' efforts by providing positive feedback was the second strategy.

For Julie, the relationships between parents and teachers should not be limited to a professional one but instead be interpersonal. She thought parents should build a friendship-like relationship with the teacher, which would be "better for the kid" and make oneself "comfortable" during interactions. As Julie stressed:

> Build 一個好的relationship跟你的special needs kid's的teacher很重要. 跟老師之間保持著良好的關係, 對我來說, 就跟person-to-person一樣.
>
> Build[ing] a good relationship with your special needs kid's teacher is very important. To me, maintaining a good relationship with the teacher is just like maintaining a person-to-person relationship.

Though Julie recognized time as a critical factor to the relationship-building process, she also exercised the strategy of showing appreciation to accelerate this process. Julie stated that she has continued with gift-giving practices that were rooted in her Chinese culture as a way to show one's appreciation for others. She also thought gift-giving practice was part of the American culture, particularly during holidays. Julie believed that gift-giving practices could not only express her gratefulness for all professionals who were involved in her child's education but also extend the personal communication.

Showing appreciation of the teachers' hard work could also be done by providing positive feedback, Julie stated. She admitted that she had learned how

to compliment the teacher's effort, which was seldom practiced in Chinese culture:

> 我去給一個老師compliment, 這也是learn 在美國生活. 可能中國人比較含蓄, 我覺得, 不是太會表揚. 我其實不是很會表揚人家. 但是我覺得每個人都需要, 特別是老師, 我覺得他們也是working hard. 再說確實是Tim 有進步在某些方面, 我想讓她知道. 那我覺得這個是個很好的topic, 就是在交流的時候. 你給她表揚, 這個小孩進步, 對她來說是個很大的鼓勵.
>
> After residing in the U.S., I had learned how to give compliments to the teacher. I think Chinese people might be more reserved and we don't know how to give compliments. But I think it is necessary for everybody, particularly for teachers because they work very hard. Furthermore, Tim really has made progress in some areas and I want to let her know about his progress. I think this is a good topic to start with during our interactions. I think it is a great encouragement to her [Ms. Morgan] when you compliment on her hard work for the child's progress.

As mentioned in a previous section, Karen recognized the direct link between good parent-teacher relationships and the school success of her child. She had exercised two strategies to build personal relationships. The first strategy was to mutually recognize the other party's hard work:

> 互動關係中, 我們需要常常要recognize對方的優點, 對方的effort. 常常表示感謝, 常常肯定對方, 父母肯定老師, 老師肯定父母. 常常有positive的approach 對彼此.
>
> During interpersonal interactions, we need to consistently recognize the strengths and effort of the other party. We need to recognize the other party by expressing our thankfulness. Parents recognize teachers' efforts

> and teachers recognize parents' efforts. Parents and teachers should often interact with each other in a positive approach.

In addition, Karen would visit school and the bookstore occasionally to show her support and appreciation of teachers and the store manager. In addition to providing positive feedback, Karen showed her appreciation by carrying out gift-giving practices as her second strategy to establish personal relationships.

Initiation of personal conversation. In addition to using gifts as an invitation for "personal communication" with teachers, Julie further stated that by chatting about topics, which went beyond school-related issues, had helped her feel more comfortable when talking with Ms. Morgan:

> Relationship, 我覺得, 不光只是教學, 不光只是讀書, 不光是你的孩子怎麼learn, 我覺得還有personal. 她會告訴我她去spring break啊, 去Colorado ski啊, 我們也會有一點joke, '不要broke 妳的leg 回來.' 她回來就, '我沒有broke 我的leg.'
>
> I think relationship is not just about teaching, studying, and how your child learns. I think it is also about personal relationships. She would tell me that she went to Colorado to ski during spring break. I would joke with her, 'Don't break your leg.' She said, 'I did not break my leg.' when she was back.

Learning from her personal experiences interacting with people from other ethnic groups in the U.S., Julie realized that misperceptions or stereotypes could be easily formed and reinforced if she did not provide the opportunities for teacher to understand her family's background. She would purposely bring up

topics such as educational background and previous jobs in China during their conversations:

> 因為我覺得這裡most是美國人的kids, 就是很少外國的小孩. 那我覺得我們肯定跟別人的background不一樣, 所以還是希望她了解我們, 就是說, 我們自己都受過良好教育, 希望大家可以open discussion.
>
> I hope that she can understand our background. Because most of the kids here are American [White] kids, they have very few kids from other countries. I think we surely have different background from that of others. Therefore, I hope she can understand our background. Because we both have received good education, hopefully, we can have an open discussion.

Three out of six teachers mentioned the importance of building personal relationships with parents. Ms. Lee identified "a personal relationship" as the foundation for effective parent-teacher communication. She thought the personal relationships between parents and teachers would "allow both sides to be more open and honest with each other."

With all of the parents she worked with, Ms. Lee always started with questions about home, such as "How are things going at home?" and avoided to "jump to conclusions." During the process of gathering information about home life and learning that things went smoothly at home, Ms. Lee would "feel relaxed" in her interactions with parents. For Ms. Lee, feeling relaxed meant being "comfortable" which appeared to be an indicator of an established relationship. Ms. Lee described her feeling about her first face-to-face meeting with Ms. Han:

> Just like open, very casual, and very personable not like a teacher-parent con[ference]. Not like a professional and a parent. Just more personable and more comfortable.

Like Ms. Lee, Ms. Gable also felt "comfortable" during her communication with Ms. Han. "I do feel that we have a good understanding where she feels comfortable talking to me or coming to me and I will feel comfortable talking to her." as described by Ms. Gable.

Ms. Gable stated that having personal relationships was one of the necessary conditions for successful communication. In terms of her personal relationships with Ms. Han, Ms. Gable believed their relationships were strengthened by "having that outside" contact by living in the same community. Furthermore, she stated that these personal relationships had progressed from the getting-to-know to the knowing-each-other stage for the parents and other teachers involved in the educational process of Brian:

> I think everybody, we've got to know Brian. They've [Parents] got to know [us]. They know us now. We just know all each other better. And that makes a difference [in communication].

For Ms. Dee, establishing the "personal connection" was the first step toward successful communication between teachers and parents. Ms. Dee described her strategy to establish personal relationships and to recognize the "personality" of a parent by asking questions about personal background information. For example, she would ask parents "Where are you from?" and

"How long have you been in the school system?" Ms. Dee suggested to further converse with parents on topics related to their child's interest or after school activities:

> 'I hear he is interested in drama. What has he done? Or if he's still gonna do special Olympics, how and when did he start?' Just kind of understanding the history that usually kind of starts the conversation. Then came in sort of reveal personality of mine and theirs.

Ms. Dee further elaborated on her idea about personality that would help both the parent and the teacher find the best way to "approach" each other and to maintain their communication:

> That just sort of makes my communication easier. If they know my personality, they know they can call me up for anything. And they might talk to another teacher [about the same thing] who they're going to think, 'Well, I am gonna wait on that.'

As stated in a previous section, Ms. Dee was greatly involved in the establishment and operations of the Parents Network. She also believed she could become familiar with the parents of her students during the Parents Network meetings. She described the positive outcome of attending the meeting, which "was a great way for me to get to know the parents outside of IEPs, outside of school concerns."

Provision of Access. Ms. Dee had tried to provide the "access" for parents to participate in the educational process of their children including visiting the classroom and going "field trips" with the class. She felt that parents would have

better ideas what their children were "doing" and "learning" in class, which would generate "communication" about "What works and what doesn't" during conversation. Ms. Dee also recognized that not all parents were able to visit the school because of their working schedules. However, she emphasized that if parents could make the effort to get to know the teacher that would build the "personal connection" with the teacher, who would, in turn, "maybe gonna be a little more gonna work for that child."

Maintaining Two-Way Communication

Having parent and teacher share information about home and school emerged as one of the themes for effective home-school communication.

Although her communication with Ms. Han did not "happen on the real regular basis," Ms. Gable thought their communication had been "good." She also highlighted the importance of frequency and "different forms" of parent-teacher communication:

> Having communicating quite frequently. It seems to really help having the different forms, the written and as well as the verbal.

Ms. Gable mentioned that "the little spiral notebook" was expressly used to communicate between her and parents of Brian. However, Ms. Gable told me that the teaching assistants were the people "doing the writing." This notebook provided her a way to communicate with the parents about the academic progress

and behaviors of Brian in school. Ms. Gable likewise expected the parents would keep her informed of related information from home:

> It's very important for the parents to let me know Brian is unhappy with something or if something that's occurred that I am not aware of. I will depend upon them to come to me to bring that up.

Furthermore, Ms. Gable emphasized the significance of maintaining communication among the parents and all involved teachers of Brian to meet his educational needs:

> Certainly keeping the line of communication open with the other teachers and his parents, everyone who is involved. So we can kind of reinforcing each other. I guess just be persistent with him [Brian].

As mentioned by Ms. Brown, "the daily notebook" had greatly helped communication between herself, the SED staff, and Ms. Han. She believed that the communication was consistent because Ms. Han "writes back in the notebook every day." Although Ms. Brown was concerned that communication might be "missed" at the beginning, she told me that they had never had any miscommunications. She emphasized:

> I think we're all learning how to communicate with each other as a team so that by the time the information gets home to Ms. Han, it's straight.

Julie had been emphasizing the importance of information sharing between parent and teacher throughout our interviews. Some of the examples mentioned by Julie were concerns about academic progress and behavioral issues, changes of medication, and strategies to work with the student. She viewed two-

way conversation between the parents and teachers regarding topics such as the child's learning and behaviors at school and home as the key to ensuring Tim's educational success. Julie further told me that she wished that someone had told her how critical it was to have more "contacts" with schools and teachers as she recalled the experience when they were under the school's pressure to transfer their child to another special school in Arizona.

Sending emails to parents of Tim without receiving responses from them had made Ms. Morgan form numerous assumptions about their communication that were discussed in a prior section. Ms. Morgan could not emphasize more that she felt uninformed and uncertain about Tim's severe behavior changes. She believed that the difficulties in working with him would be alleviated if his parents could provide her crucial information about changes at home. Consequently, maintaining two-way communication was one of the crucial factors for effective parent-teacher communication from the perspective of Ms. Morgan.

Teachers' Availability to Parents as A Priority

From teachers' point of view, three out of six teachers pinpointed that being accessible to parents was the necessary condition for parent-teacher communication to occur.

Ms. Lee identified being available to parents by "giving them time as they need" as one major element to effective communication:

> The time that you are willing to give to them. Cause I know some teachers, when it's their lunch break, they don't want to talk to you [parents]. And if it is after 3:30pm, they are off. They don't want to talk to you.

In fact, the first meeting of Ms. Lee and Ms. Han lasted for about two hours.

For Ms. Gable, being available to parents was essential to generate any communication. She not only made sure that parents were aware of her availability but also encouraged them to contact her whenever they had questions:

> I have said this to them [parents of Brian] that if there is ever anything they need to talk about or have a question about, please feel free to call me here. Whatever just assuring them the lines of communication are open.

Ms. Morgan thought that she and Tim's parents shared the basic understanding that she was available to them whenever there were questions or concerns. She defined availability as being "open to them [Tim's parents] coming and asking things." Furthermore, Ms. Morgan stated:

> I am very available and I think they know that. His mom has no problem with calling me whenever. The very beginning of the year, she was calling me a lot. I think they know I am very accessible.

Ms. Morgan found herself constantly telling Tim's parents, "Let me know." whenever they had any questions as her way to inform them of her availability. Under the circumstance of feeling unsure if the parents fully

understood “the way we’re wording things” in the IEP meeting, Ms. Morgan seemed to resolve her concerns by making her availability to them her priority:

> When I say, ‘Let me know if there’s any question.’ That’s kind of letting the ball being in their court if they don’t understand. I guess that they know that I’m available. [It] would be one way to work out the difficulties.

Cultural Sensitivity

Only Karen and Ms. Dee perceived the impact of cultural and communication differences on parent-teacher communication effectiveness. Accounts of her life experiences, Karen highlighted five aspects with respect to cultural issues in communication including (a) cultural differences; (b) cultural awareness; (c) teacher’s role and responsibilities; (d) different communication style; and (e) strategy.

Cultural differences. Karen mentioned that there were “cultural differences” between Chinese and Americans that were potential barriers to communication. First, she talked the stereotypes of Chinese parents held by Americans:

> 他們覺得你們中國人就是, 對孩子就一定是只有academic. 這是一個 stereotype. Even though 是true. 還有, 他腦子裡面中國人就是either 不管, 不會管孩子, 放縱孩子, 或者是管的太嚴. 你們就很重視academic.
>
> They [Americans] think that Chinese only value academics. Even though that is true, it is still a stereotype. Moreover, in their mind, Americans think that Chinese parents either do not discipline their children, do not know how to discipline their children and leave their children to do

whatever they want, or Chinese parents discipline their children too strictly and only focus on Academic performance.

Second, Karen believed that "racial issues" might play a role during the intercultural interactions. She mentioned that some Americans, particular southwesterners and "rednecks," usually had their own "perceptions" or "stereotypes" of Chinese Americans seemed to lack the skills to interact appropriately with Chinese Americans. Karen recalled what the school personnel had said to her when she transferred her son to Peace Elementary School in this current school district more than ten years ago:

> 她第一次看到我中國人跑到這來, 她以為我是很窮. 她說, 我們學校有 free lunch, free breakfast. I said, 'I don't need that. 但是Nice of you to ask, to say that.' 他們覺得你窮. 他們就不知道嘛.
>
> This was the first time for this person to see a Chinese coming to this school district. She thought I was very poor. She told me that they had free lunch and free breakfast program in their school. I said, 'I don't need that. But, it's nice of you to ask and to say that.' They thought we were poor people because they did not know us.

Cultural awareness. Karen emphasized that school personnel at Peace Elementary School should have "respect[ed]" and needed to be aware of differences as a result of "culture, religion," and "social economic status." She said:

我是覺得怎麼說話很重要, 譬如說, 如果她能夠說, '我想妳是不需要, 但是我就是告訴妳. 我們學校就是有 free lunch, free breakfast這些.' 那不就很好了嗎. Instead of 說, 'We have this.'

I think how to express one's thoughts is very important. For example, if that school personnel could say, 'I think you might not need these but I still have to tell you that we have free lunch and free breakfast program in our school.' Isn't that good enough? Instead of telling me, 'We had this [program].'

Karen commented that this experience did not make too much impact in her following interactions with this particular school staff because she was "sensitive" to these cultural differences.

Teacher's role and responsibilities. Karen pinpointed there was a differing view of the perceptions and expectations of the role of teachers in Chinese and American societies. She emphasized that teachers were held in high esteem in Chinese culture while the teaching profession was a "low-paid job" in the U.S.:

我們做老師是很清高的, 是很受尊敬的. 可是在美國做老師是 my job. This is job. 他/她可以今天做老師, 明天不做老師了. 他/她可以這樣, 他/她可是過度時期. 所以很多不一樣. 很多做老師的都是這樣. This is my job. 所謂的job就是, 我就是來賺這個錢, 就是這樣. 他/她不一定真的是dedicate他/她自己.

Teaching is a high status job and teachers are held in high esteem [in Chinese culture]. However, teaching is only viewed as a job for teachers in the U.S. This is [my] job. This person can be a teacher today and quit from teaching the next day. Teaching could be a temporary thing for them. So there are numerous different perceptions of teachers [between Chinese and Americans]. Most teachers have the attitude "This is my

> job." For them, job means that they are in teaching to make money rather than dedicating themselves into teaching.

While Chinese parents expected American teachers to perform duties accordingly, the teachers might think differently. Karen argued that, from a teacher's perspective, this attitude results in sentiments such as: "Why should I do that?" or this was not my "job duty."

Different communication style. The "golden rule" as mentioned by Karen was to speak more softly. Karen commented that Chinese including people from China and Taiwan tended to speak too loud:

> 就是嘴較大聲 *(speaks Taiwanese),* 比較大聲, 比較直接, 比較blunt. 對他們來講, 我們太blunt. 像我就是這樣, Ms. Han也是這樣. 就是太blunt. Either 太blunt, 要不然就是畏畏縮縮的, 他們覺得他們可以把你吃下去了.

> Chinese people speak too loud. We tend to speak louder as well as more direct and blunter when we talk to Americans. For Americans, Chinese parents like Ms. Han and myself are too blunt. On one hand, they [Americans] think Chinese parents are too blunt. On the other hand, they think they can take advantage of those [Chinese] parents who are too gentle and withdrawn.

In addition, Karen described another characteristic of being "passive-aggressive" as shown by some Chinese parents that might damage the relationship-building process with teachers. Karen believed that these parents might not have the necessary "communication skills" or they were inclined to talk behind the teachers' back and never communicated directly with them.

Strategy. Karen recommended that Chinese parents needed the "personal skills" to "break through" those communication barriers as a result of those aforementioned cultural differences. She defined personal skills as being "open, sincere, and honest" when talking with Americans.

Topics pertaining to (a) exposure and awareness; (b) cultural sensitivity; and (c) strategy raised by Ms. Dee are also reviewed.

Exposure and awareness. Ms. Dee told me that she grew up in a diverse neighborhood. Her father and mother had doctoral degrees in French and Spanish respectively. Her mother was teaching English to students from CLD backgrounds. As a matter of fact, Ms. Dee thought of herself as "technically" being from a diverse cultural environment even though she was White:

> I think that I have a greater understanding than certainly the average Americans just because of the exposure and a lot of my friends and growing up around a lot of Asian Americans, Chinese Americans in particular. I have like basic multicultural understanding and I don't know as far as specifics.

Additionally, Ms. Dee had initiated conversations both with Karen and Terry about Taiwan, Karen's country of origin.

Cultural sensitivity. Ms. Dee had remained sensitive across all channels of communications including cultures, languages, communication styles, and personality. As far as language concerned, Ms. Dee did not perceive language as an obstacle in her communication with Karen:

> There haven't been too many language barriers that come out. I mean her language, her English is very good. And she is good about explaining in a roundabout way if I am not quite getting what she's saying.

Even though Ms. Dee thought that Karen had "a good command of English," she emphasized the "multicultural thing, like that wire" had played a major role in her part of communication process. When activating her "multicultural thing" during conversation, Ms. Dee was consciously aware of what and how Karen talked "Because it could be cultural. So don't corner her or something or don't feel cornered because it could be we're having a language barrier." Ms. Dee further provided the following hypothetical situation to exemplify how her "wire" or filtered thinking had kept her aware and sensitive to the same verbal responses from two people. One was Ms. Wade who shared the similar cultural and linguistic background with her. The other was Karen who did not necessarily adopt the same cultural values and communication styles.

> If I'm sitting talking to her [Karen], and if she were rude. I think the first thing in my brain would be like: 'Is that cultural?' Like that's the first wire [that's] gonna trip instead of if Ms. Wade is talking to me and she is rude. Yea, I perceive that way because that communication comes this way. I am gonna kind of be like this [think that Ms. Wade is rude] faster because I am not going to filter it thinking.

In addition, Ms. Dee was also aware of the fact that first generation immigrants would have a quite different "style" and "approach" in terms of their communication patterns. She paralleled her personal example to the possible

challenges facing by Karen whose "approach [was] almost like a New Yorker" from Ms. Dee's perspective:

> I'm sure to a southwesterner who's gonna talk real slow and like a true born southwesterner is real slow movement. And I am like East coast, 'Got to go, got to go.' I think I probably sometimes come across. And I think Asian Americans, Chinese Americans tend to be a lot like that too. Like, 'OK, let's get it done. OK. Very good.'

Ms. Dee also mentioned that she would remind herself that "Karen is gonna deal with things very differently than everybody else in Taiwan or every other Taiwanese American." Consequently, she would not generalize her impression of Karen to all other Taiwanese American parents.

Strategy. Ms. Dee mentioned three strategies used to facilitate her communicate with Karen. First, she would "use the language" that Karen could easily understand. Second, she would "check for understanding" with Karen more frequently than she was talking with other parents. Third, Ms. Dee tried to "make sure my nonverbal" postures would not be confusing for Karen.

Recognizing what was known because of her life experiences and what was unknown in terms of her communication with Karen, Ms. Dee emphasized:

> There are tons of things I don't know. So I am always kind of like, that could be one of those things I don't know. I need to kind of leave myself open to that.

Developing the Characteristics of A Good Communicator

There were three traits necessary for both teachers and parents as mentioned by several participants. They expected a good communicator would be (a) open and respectful to suggestion; (b) a good listener; and (c) able to seek clarification.

Being open and respectful to suggestions. Ms. Lee emphasized the importance of showing respect to each other during parent-teacher interactions:

> Respect for each other as professionals, as experts of the child [when] communicating [with each other]. Like maybe from the teacher's point, I would just let them, parents, know that I am open to any suggestions or comments that they make.

From her view, Brian's parents were "very respectful" of what she had to offer for Brian's education. "They are very open, very supportive. And they are very respectful of what you have to say." as Ms. Lee stated.

Being a mother of an exceptional child, Julie acknowledged the challenges that Ms. Morgan had to face when working with her son. Therefore, she always respected their career choices of SED teachers:

> 我覺得跟老師保持著良好的關係. 良好關係的成就, 我覺得是相互 respect each other. 相互尊重, 然後相互open discussion.
>
> I believe that parents should maintain a good relationship with the teacher, which should be built upon mutual respect. As a result, it leads to open discussion between parents and teachers.

Julie highlighted the significance of being respectful to each other as the cornerstone in building personal relationships as well as having open discussions. Julie felt that Ms. Morgan was being open to her by not hesitating to share even negative news about Tim's progress and behaviors at school with her and inviting input from her.

Because of previous experience with Tim's school in Arizona, Henry emphasized greatly that both parents and teachers should show "mutual respect" when communicating with each other. He further declared that both sides should remain "open" to different opinions from their counterparts.

Karen stated that both parents and teachers should "support" rather than "criticize" each other. From her point of view, they needed to remain open to differing views about the educational goal of the student. As she emphasized:

> 開會的時候, 父母可以講他們還想要什麼, 那老師可以說, '我們試試看.' 不要馬上reject家長的意見, 不要馬上就reject老師的意見. 可以listen, then consider it, 然後come out some mutual, 就是兩邊都可以接受的一個goal.
>
> During [the IEP] meeting, parents can express what they want for the child. The teacher can say, 'Let's try.' [The teachers] should not reject the parents' suggestions right away [while the parents] should not reject the teacher's suggestions immediately either. Both parents and teachers should listen [to each other], then consider it, and come out with a mutually acceptable goal for the child.

Ms. Dee pinpointed the essential characteristic a teacher should have was being open:

> My personal philosophy when I approach everyone is just that openness. For the parent-teacher thing, I think it's really the responsibility of the teacher to be open.

Additionally, Ms. Dee believed teachers should remain open when communicating with parents who might have different or even negative attitudes toward teachers. She thought that "it's up to me [her] to figure out" why parents would have such attitudes.

She applauded Karen's openness when she was providing honest but different opinions from Karen's during their "graduation talk." During another conversation about Karen's plan for her son to attend the local community college, Karen was also open to Ms. Dee's recommendations to discuss with other experienced professionals and to research on other transitional options for Terry:

> She [Karen] seemed interested in what I had to say. I was asking more questions than I was offering information. But I wanted her to ask questions to some other people who know a lot more about transition but she seemed open to it.

<u>Being a good listener.</u> For Ms. Gable, one of the explanations why there were not "any real challenge" in her communication with Brian's parents was because "they are good listeners." She explained:

> They seem to really listen to what I say or what the other teachers say. And they provide feedback. Some parents you can say, give them

> information. But it's almost like they are not listening to what you are saying. They already have a preconceived notion.

Ms. Gable further expected teachers to be good listeners as well:

> I think just really listening to what it is they [parents] are saying and really taking into account what Brian's needs are and what they see as his need has been, and responding to that.

Seek clarification. Ms. Han thought parents should ask for an explanation before jumping to any conclusion, which could ruin the relationship. When Ms. Lee did not write in the notebook, Ms. Han decided to ask clarification:

> 妳要先問她, '你為什麼不寫notebook, Brian書包裡都有notebook, 妳有什麼事可以告訴我啊.' 然後她還是不寫, 我就還會再提醒她, '我今天又沒有看到妳的note.'

> You needed to ask her [Ms. Lee] first. 'Why did you not write in the notebook? We had a notebook in Brian's backpack. You could let me know if you have something to tell me.' If she still did not write. I would remind her again. 'Today, I still did not see your note.'

Ms. Gable mentioned "asking for clarification" from Ms. Han as the solution when she had difficulty understanding Ms. Han in their written communication. She stated by "having the verbal conversation and just asking questions to clarify" had helped her to understand what Ms. Han tried to communicate.

Most of the time, Ms. Morgan would summarize and reflect back what she heard when she thought, from her perspective, that the parents were struggling to

find words during conversations. At the same time, she wanted to provide opportunities for the parents to clarify their own thoughts:

> Sometimes, I'll give them a word. Maybe I'll say like, 'He was agitated.' If they're kind of explaining around something when they say something. I said, 'So this is what you mean that he dah dah dah.' And they'll go, 'yea' or something like that. So just kind of rephrasing it or giving it back to them to make sure that what I think they're saying is what they mean to be saying.

Both teachers and parents further stated five desirable parental qualities. These consisted of (a) being open to share information; (b) being open and respectful to suggestions; (c) expressing clearly; (d) providing feedback; and (e) using various communication styles.

Being open to share information. Ms. Han thought that parents should be "open" to express their concerns and expectations so teachers would have the chance to hear their views. As stated in a previous section, Ms. Han described her behavior of sharing her dissatisfaction with Brian's former ASK teacher, her expectations for Ms. Lee, and for Brian's educational needs during their first meeting as to "open [herself] up."

Ms. Lee defined ineffective parent-teacher communication as when parents stopped talking to the teacher and were reluctant to "share what's going on with their children and the child's life." According to her, Ms. Han was an "open" parent because she was more than willing to share information about Brian during the parent-teacher conference before the IEP meeting. Ms. Lee

stated that she "was very satisfied" as Ms. Han "opens up and lets me know if she has any concerns or what she wants me to know, what she wants to be worked on."

Being open and respectful to suggestions. Ms. Gable identified being open as one trait of a good communicator. She described Brian's parents as open when they were receptive to suggestions and ideas to help Brian.

According to Ms. Brown, Ms. Han was "open" to her suggestions for what she planned for Brian academically and socially. Such example was provided in an aforementioned section.

Karen believed that only "mature" persons could build a "healthy relationship" with each other. When probed her definition of a "mature person," she used a counter example to provide her definition. According to her, an immature parent was defined as a selfish parent who would make unreasonable demand and was unable to be open to different views:

> 她對別人的要求, 她不能夠了解, 她只有想到她自己. 一直想到她自己的需要. 一個 mature 的人是會想到別人的需要. 如果一直想自己的需要, 而沒有考慮到對方的立場的時候, 你會對老師造成一個威脅. 就是說, 你只有想到你自己的孩子. 你沒有想到, 做老師也是很盡力.

> She [Immature mother] can not understand others' requests. She can only think of herself and her needs. A mature person will consider others' needs. If you keep focusing on what you need without taking other's situation into consideration, you will become threatening to the teacher.

> You have only thought about your child and ignored the fact that the teachers are doing their best as well.

Ms. Wade perceived Karen as being open when she presented an opposing view about Karen's proposal to home school Terry during that parent-initiated conference before the IEP meeting. According to Ms. Wade, Karen had shown her openness by asking for her honest opinions and remained receptive and positive to her suggestion.

Expressing clearly. Being clear was the necessary trait of parents to help teachers understand them. Ms. Han meant that parents should make their points clear during the communication process.

Being clear with expression was one characteristic that Ms. Lee identified as a trait of a good communicator. She detailed how Ms. Han's clear expression bettered her understanding of Ms. Han's concerns and expectations:

> She was very vocal. She basically said what's on her mind. When it comes to Brian, she is a very passionate person. You can tell exactly what she wants. She wants to be taken seriously. She is very clear about that. You can tell by her words, and by her nonverbal communication, her nonverbal gestures and the look.

During their interactions, Ms. Gable felt that Ms. Han. was "good at verbalizing her expressions, her expectations" which seemed to minimize any possible misunderstanding.

Providing feedback. Positive feedback such as appreciation for teacher's effort and teaching was the type of feedback that Ms. Gable valued most. She

stated that Ms. Han had told her "how appreciative they are" as parents on several occasions:

> It's nice to know when you are working hard that somebody sees that. She is very good about recognizing that. That's a good one. She's done that. She will even hug me.

Ms. Han's feedback in the format of appreciation or support of her work was another trait that made Ms. Brown felt they had a positive relationship in terms of parent-teacher communication.

As discussed earlier, Ms. Morgan had been sending emails to keep the parents informed regarding what was happening with Tim at school. Ms. Morgan wished that the parents could keep her informed of what was going on with Tim at home as well. For example, she wanted the parents to respond to her email more frequently. She identified two types of feedback that were often missing from her email communication with the parents. One was their feedback on information that she was reporting to them. The other was their acknowledgement of receiving her emails particularly when she reported the high frequency of Tim's behavioral problems.

Karen was a good communicator according to Ms. Dee because she frequently provided feedback in the form of showing support to teachers and programs. Ms. Dee identified feedback as another crucial component in generating "good and meaningful communication." Ms. Dee recalled Karen was

one of the concerned parents who approached her regarding the Home and Community class. Karen "was very supportive" of her content of curriculum after Ms. Dee had explained how she would integrate math and reading in her life skill training class.

Though feedback could be provided in various forms depending on the content, Ms. Wade considered appreciation expressed by parents as the most valuable one. She stated:

> I know for me, and it made a tremendous difference if parents show appreciation. Because it is extremely hard work, extremely challenging. And it's very frustrating to get only negative feedback. So when positive comments come along and when there's some appreciation for a hard work, it really does help a lot to know you're appreciated and you're doing the right thing.

Ms. Wade commented that she had received positive feedback from Karen during their interactions. Receiving a gift from Karen had made Ms. Wade think that the gift was Karen's way of showing appreciation for her work:

> She's thanked especially when we had that problem with the bathroom. She was really appreciative of everything that was done and in the way it was done. And that really helped a lot. It's just an emotional thing. It's gratifying to know.

Reporting problems or concerns in a "non-confrontive" manner was also identified as another type of feedback as mentioned by Ms. Wade. She stated that parents should contact teacher "when there's a problem" and to collaborate with teacher during the problem-solving process.

Summary

In this chapter, the findings from interviews with four Chinese American parents and six teachers who were involved in their children's educational process are presented based on the guiding research questions for the study. Four shared themes were emerged from participants' narratives of their encountered challenges during parent-teacher communication. First, both parents and teachers had their preconceived assumptions regarding the type and degree of information sharing between home and school. Second, there were mismatched expectations of educational needs of the students concerning homework and curriculum. Third, indirect communication styles were utilized as a way to disguise the participant's dissatisfaction about their conversational partner but get their desired outcomes from their communication. Lastly, language difference was perceived as the roadblock for communication. One shared theme of uniting for student success emerged from participants' accounts of positive interactions and outcomes as a result of successful parent-teacher communication. Components and practices to better parent-teacher communication consisted of (a) building personal relationships; (b) maintaining two-way communication; (c) making availability to parents a priority; (d) cultivating cultural sensitivity; and (e) developing the characteristics of a good communicator including desired qualities for teacher and parent are discussed.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter discusses the study findings by the illustration of working hypotheses, which are defined as "general statements applicable to the specific context under investigation" (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 61). In this chapter, I also reflect and consider how these findings contribute to our understanding of parent-teacher communication from the personal accounts of six teachers and four Chinese American parents. I further offer recommendations with regard to educational practice and future research. Limitations and contributions of this study are addressed.

Working Hypotheses

During the research process, the hypotheses were formulated and reshaped as I generated and analyzed data and discussed with peer debriefers. They emerged from data generated in the particular context studied rather than generalizing to all contexts. Five such working hypotheses are presented for the discussion of findings.

Working hypothesis 1*: Communication between parents and teachers was more likely to be initiated when conflicts occurred. These teachers and parents had the notion that the role and purpose of communication were to resolve conflicts.*

As Gudykunst and Kim (1997) stated that motivation was the first component for effective intercultural communication to happen. According to them, the need to avoid diffuse anxiety was one of the four motivating factors for us to interact with others. In the case of parents in this study, Ms. Han, Julie, and Karen were anxious and concerned about whether their children's learning needs were met. To gratify their need to reduce the anxiety, each of them requested a conference with the teacher. For Ms. Brown, Ms. Morgan, and Ms. Wade, they all contacted the parents to either sought parents' input or share the information about the students' misbehaviors in schools. Under these circumstances, conflicts appeared to be the primary motivator for parents and teachers to communicate with each other.

Additionally, five out of 10 participants shared the assumption of "No news is good news" when no concerns or disagreements were expressed explicitly. This assumption was further used to guide their own behaviors and explain those of their counterparts. In such way, it seemed that their need for predictability about others' words and behaviors was met (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Ms. Morgan, for example, made her assumption that Tim's parents were receiving and

reading but just not replying to her emails based on the low counts of emails she had got from them. She further concluded that they were not so "involved" in email exchanges like they were during face-to-face meeting. Consequently, their non-responsive behaviors to her emails were perceived as predictable to Ms. Morgan, who kept sending emails reporting Tim's progress in school.

Ms. Morgan continued holding her postulation during that period of time when she was sending her emails about Tim's escalated behavior problems to an incorrect email address. While around the same time, Henry felt relieved and assumed that Tim was behaving in school when Ms. Morgan neither called nor emailed him after receiving numerous negative calls about Tim's behavior problems in the early semester. The communication breakdowns of email exchanges intensified the conflicts over the disciplinary procedures for Tim between the parents and the school. Apparently, the conflicts generated more discussion and led to more frequent parent-teacher communication as described by Henry.

Working hypothesis 2*: For these teachers and parents, preconceived assumptions about communication, mismatched expectations, and culture-bound communicative behaviors created challenges in parent-teacher communication.*

There was a greater likelihood that the discord seemed to be more prevalent between the parents and the new teachers of their children. The deprivation of a conference before school began left the new teachers unknown to the pre-existing system and parents' expectations of parent-teacher communication, which were the cases for Ms. Han and Julie. Ms. Han had made various interpretations of Ms. Lee's behaviors of not holding a parent-teacher conference and not participating in the written communication via the notebook, which was against Ms. Han's expectation of a teacher. Julie speculated that her son was learning nothing in school due to Ms. Morgan's laziness or incapable of redirecting her son when he was unwilling to complete any schoolwork since there was scarcely any homework from school.

Initially, both parents awaited teachers' reactions such as contacting parents for a meeting or sending home the student's schoolwork. Apparently, Ms. Han and Julie were sending their high-context messages and expecting teachers to understand their messages and perform their job duties. Apparently, these teachers were unfamiliar and unable to decode parents' high-context messages. Chinese culture is one of the high-context cultural societies, most of the information is embedded in the physical context and attached to each role (Chan, 1998; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Huang, 1993). In Chinese educational orientation, teachers not only provided instruction in school but also assigned homework for

students to complete at home. This phenomenon provided an example of well-meaning clashes, which "describes problematic encounters when such people are behaving properly and in a socially skilled manner according to their culture's norms (Brislin, 2000, p. 11)." Furthermore, it was not until Ms. Han and Julie were able to use a more direct and explicit verbal style (low-context), by detailing their expectations of the teachers, that Ms. Lee and Ms. Morgan began to understand their request for communication.

For these three Chinese American families, the mismatched expectations of their children's educational needs not only worried them but also provoked them to converse with the teachers. Ms. Han believed that Brian had the ability and needed to complete all schoolwork that his peers did while Ms. Brown thought some of the fourth-grade homework was not appropriate for Brian's academic level. Ms. Brown further pointed out that Brian needed to develop social skills required for maintaining friendships, with which he was struggling. Julie expected Tim to catch up his peers by working on academic tasks in school and doing more homework. However, the focus of middle school curriculum was reinforcing and expanding the academic skills that the students already had and assisting students with life skills as described by Ms. Morgan. Concerning the disciplinary procedures for Tim's behavior, both Julie and Henry expected that the school and teachers would design a plan to ensure Tim's schooling a success

rather than send Tim home because he could not be successful in school. Karen regarded reading skills as the prerequisite for Terry to perform job duties, understand conversation in TV programs, or read magazines at his leisure. Ms. Dee and Ms. Wade gave their emphasis on helping Terry acquire vocational and independent living skills.

The parents emphasized the importance of academic skills acquisition while the teachers highlighted the developments of appropriate social and self-sufficient living skills. Although both parents and teachers had their best interests in the students' educational needs, there was a contrasting pattern regarding their perceptions of what the students' needs were. Repeatedly, well-meaning cultural clashes took place. Apparently, these parents, who described themselves as educated parents, demanded scholastic goals for their children. This phenomenon is consistent with literature (e.g., Stevenson & Stigler, 1992), which describes the high values placed on academics by Asian American parents. It indicated the traditional Chinese educational orientation was still practiced by parents in this study. Consequently, the potential for conflict increased enormously when the school curriculum was planned to prepare students for independence as stated by the teachers. This phenomenon further illustrated both parents' and teachers' lack of knowledge about how to gather information considered relevant when setting the educational goal for the students. Their lack of knowledge about how to solicit

input from each other increased the chance for misunderstanding and misinterpretation of messages (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

The communication styles used by parents and teachers from different cultures were often not the same. Each culture had its own set of rules and values, which caused all kinds of events to have a variety of meanings. Hence, cultural variation in values led to even greater problems for both sides. Three such events are discussed to illustrate the cultural-bound parent-teacher communicative behaviors. These consisted of (a) use of silence; (b) indirect style of communication; and (c) conflict resolution.

Use of Silence

When both Ms. Han and Julie silently awaited communication to be initiated by Ms. Lee and Ms. Morgan, they were concerned and dissatisfied. In contrast to parents' meanings of silence, Ms. Lee and Ms. Morgan held the belief that parents were in agreement with everything if no questions were asked. The similar conclusion was inferred when Ms. Dee and Ms. Wade remarked that Karen was receptive to their suggestions for what was best for Terry's education when she withheld her proposal of home schooling. In conflicts with the American mainstream cultures which had guided these teachers' to interpret these parents' behaviors, "silence" did not necessarily mean "no problem or O.K." from the perspectives of these parents (Cheng, 1989). Ultimately, Ms. Han and Julie

broke silence to voice their expectations of their children and of the teachers while Karen became silent about her beliefs in what was best for her son.

Ms. Morgan questioned if Tim's parents understood all information exchanged in her personal encounters with them and presented in meetings due to their limited English proficiency. However, in reaction to Julie and Henry's lack of responses to her emails, Ms. Morgan further assumed that they understood as well as agreed with all the services provided to Tim. It is worth mentioning that Ms. Morgan felt entrapped whether she should show her respect for the parents by keeping silent without repeating information when she was uncertain their level of comprehension.

Indirect Style of Communication

Despite widespread discontent and even disappointment with the school education, three mothers in this study employed indirect style of communication to express concerns without manifestation of any negative emotions or attitudes toward the teachers. Their intention was to avoid direct confrontation, thus faces were saved and harmony was maintained. The need to save face is highly valued in collectivistic cultures in countries such as China and Taiwan (Cheng, 1989). Karen viewed her decision to let Terry stay at school as "給她一個 [giving a] favor" to the director of SED. Interestingly, the director was Terry's former high school teacher in that district, which raised the possibility that Karen was

returning her favor to the director, who had supported Karen's request during one of Terry's previous IEP meetings.

Chan (1998) argued that traditional Asian American parents expected "moral obligation and reciprocity" (p. 332) in successful professional-family relationships. This seemed to characterize the type of personal relationships anticipated by the parents in this study. According to Chan, reciprocity means favors that were given and returned by mutual consent. During the process of interchange of favors, teachers were perceived as favor-givers by providing education to the students while their parents were favor-receivers who would repay their gratitude when appropriate. Karen's reasoning process for Terry to stay one more year in school exemplified the exchange of favors between her and the director of SED.

Ms. Morgan was aware of the differences between Tim's parents compared to Anglo-American parents who were more likely to provide information, which was perceived as critical for working with the students by Ms. Morgan. She seemed to expect Tim's parents would be like White parents who are more likely to understand her unstated expectation of information about medication changes and home life. When no responses were received, Ms. Morgan further adopted the indirect style of communication, and using a low-context style, offered Tim's parents a behavior chart so she could monitor Tim's

behavior changes along with his current prescriptions. Although Ms. Morgan's intention was to gather information about Tim's medication changes, her behavior was misinterpreted as showing her genuine and personal concern for Tim by Julie.

The most intriguing findings about information sharing were the contradictory accounts from Ms. Morgan and Julie. Ms. Morgan did not feel she obtained much information from the parents while Julie stated that she had transformed from being cultural-restrained to fairly proactive in terms of information sharing with Ms. Morgan. One possibility is that Julie was not aware that she was not providing the type of information sought by Ms. Morgan because of the lack of feedback from Ms. Morgan. Furthermore, Ms. Morgan was uncertain if the information she provided through emails was what Tim's parents wanted to know since they seldom replied to her emails. Consequently, Ms. Morgan not only failed to share her expectations with the parents but also attributed all communication barriers to the parents' difficulties in expressing and comprehending English. Unfortunately, the discourse codes or rules were never addressed explicitly (Cheng, 1996; Chang, Lai, and Shimizu, 1999) which could prevent such misunderstanding and inappropriate assumptions from taking place.

Conflict Resolution

Ms. Brown recognized that Ms. Han had a pattern of addressing her concerns to a third party. One such example provided by Ms. Brown was the

misinterpretation of exhibited behaviors at the cultural luncheon. However, Ms. Han's description was unavailable. From the individualistic cultural perspective, Ms. Brown felt upset when she found out from the third party, which was the SED staff, that her behaviors had been misunderstood by Ms. Han. Members from individualistic cultures prefer direct fashion of dealing with conflicts while members from collectivistic favor indirect way of handling conflicts (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). From a cultural perspective, it was possible that Ms. Han was uncomfortable with direct confrontation and chose to approach the SED teacher as a third party mediator. The similar pattern was evident in a previous incident when Ms. Han expressed her concerns to the GED teacher (Ms. Gable) and the principal about the former SED teacher, who did not provide playgroup at that time. Coming from a collectivistic culture that valued indirect communication, Ms. Han expressed her worry and discontent with the SED staff who functioned as the mediator between Ms. Han and Ms. Brown. Consequently, Ms. Han's needs for face-saving and maintenance of harmonious relationships were met. Moreover, Ms. Brown did not realize that she had supported Ms. Han's similar needs when she continued the discussion with the SED staff without mentioning her discomfort to Ms. Han.

Working hypothesis 3*: For parents, preserving harmony and maintaining personal relationships with teachers were perceived as the primary focus of parent-teacher interactions. In turn, these relationships further facilitated their ability to communicate successfully with the teachers. Strategies employed comprised of sharing information, showing appreciation, and supporting school learning activities.*

In traditional Chinese culture, argumentation is often not as crucial as it is in the U.S.; in accordance with Confucianism, one would conform to the rules to preserve harmony in a collectivistic society (Chan, 1998). In the case of Karen, she explicitly stated that conflicts could be avoided when she dropped her personal plan for Terry's educational needs in order to be in congruence with those of the teachers. Consequently, her personal relationships with the teachers would remain positive. Moreover, the three mothers in this study all recognized the limits of what teachers could offer concerning the education of their children. In addition to honoring teachers' professionalism in educating their children, these parents compensated what was missing from school with either the provision of tutorial help or the assistance of home-based learning activities. Instead of demanding teachers meet all of their children's educational needs, which might damage the harmonious relationships with the teachers, these parents

carried on the two traditions mentioned above which were commonly practiced in Taiwan.

Collectivistic orientation, which placed the highest value on human relations and the preservation of harmony and face (Chan, 1998) guided these three mothers' behaviors in their social interactions with the teachers. Apparently, they all valued the importance of forging personal relationships with the teachers, which would facilitate successful parent-teacher communication and benefit their children's educational services. From the parents' point of view, beneficial outcomes to their children's education appeared to be the final product of the successful parent-teacher relationships. For Ms. Han, having strong personal relationships with Ms. Gable and the speech therapist had further kept her informed of inside information within the school. Karen had help Terry secured his job at the local bookstore by establishing personal relationships with his supervisor and co-workers. They both concluded that personal relationships were the most influential factor to ensure a positive outcome from the parent-professional interactions.

In congruence with the construct of reciprocity of cultural norms (Chan, 1998), holidays such as Christmas and Valentine's Day were such occasions for these parents to repay their appreciation to teachers' effort through gift giving.

Other expressions of appreciation as mentioned by them included complimenting teachers' hard work and sharing positive news about the students' achievements.

Working hypothesis 4*: For teachers, successful parent-teacher communication required parental support and collaborative effort to ensure positive outcomes for students.*

It was worth noting the remarkable connection between teachers' assumptions about parent-teacher communication and their criteria to judge successful communication experiences. Both Ms. Lee and Ms. Gable regarded Brian's strong improvement in his social skills as a success resulting from parent-teacher communication. It obviously indicated a successful outcome of their communication with Karen when Terry did not exhibit any more health and behavior problems in the bathroom, voiced by Ms. Dee and Ms. Wade. Henry's email, which successfully managed Tim' behavior problems in class, was highlighted by Ms. Morgan as a success although she only requested such help once through email during school hours.

When parents responded to teachers' requests, recognized teachers' effort, or remarked the student's achievement, they were perceived as supportive parents by teachers. They were aware that the parents were reinforcing the core curriculum at home either through the provision of tutorial help from outside

professionals or the implementation of home-based learning activities. Three teachers even attributed the students' school success to the parents' hard work at home. In addition to parental support, the teachers suggested that the collaboration with parents as well as other involved teaching staff as the second requirement to achieve desired outcome.

The parents in this study seemed to practice at least three types of activities to show their involvement in their children's education based on the framework of six types of parental involvement proposed by Epstein (1995). They demonstrated their parenting skills by supporting their children's learning and school success; maintained communication with the teachers about their children's academic progress and discipline concerns; and requested relevant materials or homework to be used in learning at home. Karen further volunteered to teach after school class and collaborated with the community service by participating in the process of establishing Parents Network in the district. It seemed to point to the notion that the higher the degree of fitness between parents' behaviors and the patterns of parental involvement defined by the research community, the greater the possibility that the teachers would experience more successful parent-teacher interactions.

Working hypothesis 5*: These parents and teachers attributed communication effectiveness more to parents' individual attributes and personal relationships rather the cultural influence on communicative behavior.*

Three mothers consistently deemed personal connections as the key to effective parent-teacher communication while three teachers thought relationships would facilitate the communication process. Overwhelmingly, both parents and teachers listed more personal attributes that parents should have when expressing or receiving messages. Three identified personal attributes that both teachers and parents should have consisted of (a) being open and respectful to suggestions or differing views; (b) being a good listener; and (c) seeking clarification. Additionally, three more desired parent qualities included (a) being open to share information; (b) expressing clearly; and (c) providing feedback.

Hewstone and Brown (as cited in Gudykunst & Kim, 1997) suggested that we tended to make person-based attribution when the behaviors of others, who came from other ethnic or cultural background, were not similar to ours. It seemed to provide a plausible explanation of why the teachers in this study were more likely to reflect on what and how parents had said, such as expressing themselves in a clear manner; and pinpoint other additional personal characteristics that parents should have in order to facilitate effective parent-teacher communication. Consequently, we would be inclined to overuse personal

traits rather than seek situational factors when we explained others' behaviors (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Such situation was evident when Ms. Morgan consistently had a tendency to ascribe Tim's parents' different communicative behaviors to their limited English proficiency. It seemed that Ms. Morgan not only lacked the cultural awareness but also failed to look for alternative explanations when she noticed that Tim's parents was less likely to offer contextual information compared to White parents. In contrast to Ms. Morgan's view, Julie, Tim's mother, shared her insights from years of dealing with schools and teachers in the U.S. According to Julie's description, she used to be "bai dong" or "passive" and "ju jing" or "restrained" with respect to contacting teachers and sharing information with teachers. Seeing that Tim benefited from her having the communication with Ms. Morgan about homework, Julie began recognizing the significant link between parent-teacher communication and Tim's education. She described herself as a more "zhu-dong" or "proactive" parent in terms of sharing information with Ms. Morgan.

Only Karen and Ms. Dee addressed how cultural differences might have an impact on the communication process. In addition to having been in the U.S. for more than 20 years, Karen recognized how cultural differences could cause misunderstanding between teachers and Chinese parents because of her experiences as a special educator and a mother of an exceptional child. Because of

her personal life experiences, Ms. Dee was fairly aware of the fact that conflicts could be the result of cultural and linguistic differences. She further described that she usually avoided any miscommunication by using "filters" to look for different explanation of Karen's behaviors. However, it was hard to determine if Ms. Dee had intercultural communication skills due to the lack of opportunities to observe their interactions. Based on Gudykunst and Kim's (1997) model, both individuals demonstrated their knowledge of differences between Whites and Chinese and knowledge of seeking alternative interpretation for communicative behaviors.

Examples of well-meaning clashes characterized the phenomenon of current study findings. Although there was an alignment between teachers and parents with respect to maximizing the educational profits of the students, they varied greatly in their views of the learning goals for the students. Teachers and parents seemed to travel on the parallel tracks without shared understandings, joint expectations, and collective goals for the students. Besides the content for their communication, the focus and approaches of communication differed in participants' beliefs about education, assumptions about communication, and cultural orientations.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications for Practice

The implications presented are proposed for educational practice for teachers. Teachers are used as an umbrella term to include educators such as general and special education teachers and school professionals including but not limited to speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, counselors, who might serve Chinese American students and their families. Supplementary examples are provided when necessary and appropriate. My intention is to raise these critical issues, which are essential and need to be considered for current and future teachers who may serve Chinese American students and their families, rather than recommend generalizing the findings to all Chinese Americans. Readers are encouraged to refer to Chapter Four for descriptive information to decide if the implications are applicable to their context.

Teachers need to be aware of how their cultural frame of reference (Ogbu, 1995) guides their own thinking patterns, as well as their own behavior, and contributes to their interpretations of parents' messages and behaviors. For Ms. Morgan, indeed, her preoccupied notion of language barriers created a wall for reciprocal conversation and producing misinterpretations of parents' behaviors. Teachers should keep in mind that often, language differences could be the result

of cultural differences. How to provide teachers with not only intellectual but also experiential understanding of cultural diversities should be one of the priorities in teacher preparation programs. Therefore, teachers would gain adequate knowledge and skills to interact with parents and students from different cultural groups.

Teachers should have a reciprocal dialogue with parents to share expectations of each other and of the student, if not before, as early as school begins. Moreover, expectations of communication such as what type of information, how to deliver information, when to contact, and how often to communicate, should also be discussed. Communication rather than assumptions that "No news is good news" can facilitate mutual understanding. If Ms. Lee and Ms. Morgan had done so, the initial conflicts of Ms. Han and Julie about communication through notebook and homework could be easily avoided. Furthermore, Ms. Morgan might not trap herself in her assumptions, which led to the major conflicts over the disciplining issue, if she had expressed her needs and concerns explicitly with the parents.

Teachers must recognize the importance and meaning of building relationships to the parents, learn about the ethnicity and cultural information of the children they teach and of the family with whom they work, and develop culturally sensitive ways of connecting and establishing good relationships with

them. Chinese American parents whose cultural orientation reflects a collectivistic perspective tend to emphasize maintaining harmony and personal relationships. For Chinese American parents as well as other parents from other collectivistic cultures, forging personal relationships was viewed as a tool for communication. Teachers are encouraged to take time to listen and find opportunities to share information about the student's prior educational experiences and parents' personal backgrounds and their current concerns and needs. Through the open dialogue, teachers can establish personal relationships with parents and then move on to collaborate with parents for student success. When necessary and appropriate, teachers are encouraged to consult community informants or parents support group to be the mediator to moderate the differing views between school and home.

Teachers can be a key resource in tailoring school service as well as providing services. They must be willing to take parents' suggestions and concerns into considerations to meet the individual student, as well as their family's needs. Consequently, the IEP is more likely to accurately reflect the students' learning needs and goals and effectively serve the students if there are opportunities for parents and teachers to share their perspectives. Students will be less likely to fall between the cracks. Also, gaps between the teachers' and the parents' differing perceptions of the student's competency and mismatched

learning goals will be less frequently to occur. It seemed easy for teachers to grasp the contents of parents' messages, which were about homework and the core curriculum. However, teachers seemed unsuspecting of the indirect manner adopted by the parents. Well-meaning clashes have a long-term effect on intercultural encounters (Brislin, 2000), in turn, it might influence the process of establishing relationships, which is the most crucial component for effective intercultural communication from the parents' viewpoints. Both parents and teachers need to be aware of their different communication styles and cultural as well as educational orientations. Parents are encouraged to seek relevant information from advocacy or parents support groups. Moreover, parents are required to be the decision-makers or even the advocates for their exceptional children's education as demanded by IDEA. As in the case of Tim's parents, they appeared to have limited knowledge and resource to find information about the disciplinary procedures for their son. Consequently, they consulted me and searched on the internet for information about legal issues related to SED. Teachers should keep the parents informed of their rights and provide adequate information or resource to parents.

It is striking to find out that Ms. Dee, as a novice teacher, had the cultural sensitivity and better knowledge about cultural differences, than most of the teachers whose teaching experience ranged from 21 to five years. It could not be

emphasized enough that all these issues need to be addressed in teacher preparation program for preservice teachers as well as staff development programs for inservice teachers.

Recommendations for Future research

This study invokes a number of questions regarding the parent-teacher communication. It is evident that the parents and teachers in this study hold a different notions of the students' academic competence and educational needs. We, as educators, need to know at which level of comfort and confidence parents decide to pursue or withhold their beliefs about what program and curriculum could maximize their children's learning potentials. Furthermore, we ought to truly value parents as the experts of their children in order to forge partnerships with them. Beliefs in disabilities, descriptions of students' strengths and limitations, and expectations of the students should be considered and researched from the perspectives of teachers and parents. This finding also points to the need for a study about how teachers and parents come to realize their differences in expectations of the students' educational needs and how they negotiate and determine the learning goals and related SED services.

All parents stated that they were aware of their parental rights in relation to their children's SED services. However, their level of understanding was unclear such in the case of Tim's parents who struggled to accommodate their

own working schedules due to the changes of Tim's shortened school hours and placements in the most restricted environment. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to understand the process how parents interpret, exercise, and relinquish their parental rights; and how parents learn about their rights in relation to IDEA. A focus with parental participation in the early years of the students' labeling process and placement decisions (Harry, 1995) would be valuable to our understanding of such issue. Similar studies should also be conducted in other school districts where parents have lower SES or with other population that parents might have lower level of education, less years of residence in the U.S., and a lower level of acculturation.

Two parents mentioned the bureaucracy in the school system, which was not the research focus. It was evident that three parents had limited expectation of the teachers and the schools. This study further shed some light on trust issues between family and school, which seemed to be a shared experience among parents from CLD groups (e.g., Bennett, 1988; Harry, 1995). However, the parents in this study did not withdraw from school-related interactions and continued to be involved in their children's education. They strove to compensate at home by providing tutorial help and re-teaching their children at home so that they could advance academically. More research is necessary to better our understanding about the constructs contributing to parental involvement in their

children's education as identified by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997). For example, Tim's parents kept mentioning that they were "well-educated" parents. However, the relationship between the role and importance of education and how parents perceived their role in their children's SED is not clear.

Limitations

Since this study was conducted in one school district, it is not intended to be generalized to other situations. Limitations and issues arose during the research process are addressed to inform reader in their sense-making process and decision-making process to determine the "fittingness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124) or extent to which the context described in this study is similar to a new context.

All three families in the study resided in a wealthy school district, which is well-known for its strong parental involvement in the educational processes of the students. In addition, all of the four parents emphasized how their distinguished educational backgrounds and lessons from prior negative experiences with schools had prepared them to negotiate with current schools and teachers. Therefore, readers need be aware of the backgrounds of these Chinese American families before applying the study findings to their own situations.

Additionally, given existing contextual differences among families, teachers, and schools, the transferability of these findings is limited only to

situations that are similar in terms of contextual factors. Contextual factors to be considered included students' different categories and levels of severity of disabilities, years of receiving SED services; parents' length of residence in the U.S. and levels of acculturation; and teachers' different experiences of serving Chinese American populations.

The analysis of the participants' perspectives about their interactions during the parent-teacher conferences and IEP meeting solely depended on their reflections at various times and was likely to be influenced by their ability to recall events and conversations truthfully. The arrangement for interviews with parents and teachers was complicated by their busy schedules. Particularly for parents, they all worked during daytime and preferred to reserve nighttime for the family. Additionally, they needed to take their children to attend extra curricular activities during weekdays. Most of the interviews after the IEP meetings were unable to take place within one week as planned.

Initially, I planned to capture the nonverbal communicative behaviors during parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings by videotaping. Only one family granted me the permission while the other two declined my request for videotaping. However, it turned out to be unfeasible to me with the limitations due to physical setting such as sitting arrangements of the teachers, parents, and I; and my juggling between taking notes and observing nonverbal cues.

Consequently, most of the data were generated from interviews with the supplement of available email exchanges.

Conclusion

Continuing the research on parent-teacher communication, this study contributes a contextual understanding of the perspectives from teachers and Chinese American parents of exceptional students through the exploration of their experiences of successful and frustrating interactions and the probing into their expectations of effective communication. The analysis is illuminating an area of cultural influences on parent-teacher communication that had gone largely unexamined. Their lack of cultural awareness and knowledge; and intercultural communication skills throughout the communication process, inevitably, is the primary source of much confusion and frustration for parents as well as teachers. The findings have served as the groundwork and database for our understanding of the differing perceptions of Chinese American parents and teachers about their interactions with each other.

Appendix A: Person as Instrument Statement

As far as I can remember for my schooling years, particularly during my elementary school, I do not recall my parents ever having attended any parent-teacher conference. As a matter of fact, my parents (my father, to be correct) had come to my schools for five times during my six years of elementary education. One time was even not for me, but for my elder sister who fainted in school. My parents had never called my classroom teachers or asked me what I learned from school. Does it mean that they do not care about my education and learning? Certainly not, both my parents value education more than anything else. However, according to the U.S. mainstream culture, my case is more likely to be misinterpreted as language minority parents' lack of concern in their child's education.

I have been very self-conscious about my academic performances and mannerism in schools. The main reason is that my father used to be the chief of personnel department in the Bureau of Education in Nantou county where I received my primary and secondary education. Therefore, he knows most of the principals, administrators, and teachers of each school in Nantou county. Not only did my father know the school personnel but he also supervised their work. Coming from a culture which is more collectivist-oriented and has high "face-saving" needs, I always thought I had to achieve and behave well so that I would

not cause my parents to lose face. The Confucian cultural model, which has a great influence on Taiwanese culture, emphasizes family relationships, duties, disciplines, filial piety, parental authority, and respect for the elderly. Only those behaviors that maintain and improve the family name are considered valuable and honorable. I was taught that extraordinary individual academic and career achievements can promote collective family pride. On the other hand, I knew I would bring shame to the whole family if I showed disobedient and disrespectful behaviors, which are negatively-valued. In other words, any family member including myself represents my whole family either positively or negatively. That also explains why corporal punishment seldom occurred in my home. The feelings of shame and guilt would push me to do my best to meet my parents' expectations, even now.

The second reason I felt self-conscious is that I live in quite a small community. It is very easy to run into someone you know at the farmers' market. I remember I would see my school teachers at least once a month when accompanying my parents to the market on a weekly basis. They would chat and discuss my academic performances and behaviors in class in front of me. I figured out that I had better to be good since my parents and teachers would talk to each other and exchange information. I guess that is why I do not recall my school teachers ever making visits to my home.

Thirdly, all schools in Taiwan adopted an ability grouping model when I was in grades K-12. It also meant that I always had to compete with others such as children of neighbors, relatives, and my parents' colleagues and friends. Furthermore, teachers would compare me to other students and my two elder sisters who were their former students in areas of grades and behaviors. Being placed in the top class or scoring 99 on the test was always not good enough. My parents often said there was still room for improvement. I had to compete with all students of my grade from all schools in Taiwan when I took the entrance exam for high school and national entrance exam for university.

Family values and parental expectations continue to play influential roles in my pursuit of higher education. Suffering from communists' torture, my father escaped and fled to Taiwan by himself when Taiwan separated from China in 1949. He often laments that he lost the opportunity to pursue higher education while he was young. My mother only has middle-school education caused by poverty because Taiwan was not free from the colonization by Japan until 1945. Both of my parents underwent the hardships of wars. As a result, they view education as the most valuable thing in a human's life and a means for upward mobility. My father always said to us children, "I have no money or valuable things to give you but to provide you education" (translated from Chinese).

"Teachers are your parents forever even if they serve as your teachers for just one day." (translated from Chinese) said by Confucius. This partially explained why my parents never doubted or suggested what and how teachers should teach. Teaching is considered a high prestigious occupation while teachers are held in high esteem second only to parents in Chinese/Taiwanese culture. If parents did come to visit the classroom, it would be interpreted as they were challenging teachers' expertise. At the same time, parents were also afraid of any negative influence teachers would put on their children such as picking on them or ignoring them.

Even though my parents seldom checked and went over my homework, they did see it as their major responsibility to cultivate good study habits for me. Providing a stable home environment and emotional support, maintaining economic security, checking my grades, commanding me to reread and redo school work, assigning extra homework, and making sure that I was studying, reading, or going to school exemplified how they were involved in my schooling process. They would sacrifice anything, such as leisure time and money, for our education. As a result, we children did not even have to share and help with the housework. In fact, family involvement was better than parental involvement to describe my situation. My elder brother and sisters always supervised and helped me with my homework and study. During my learning process, my family,

including parents and siblings, were highly and directly involved in my education within my home context rather than school context.

In my country, school personnel are expected to decide all matters without regard to parental concerns or desires. School personnel seldom contact parents unless their children are sick or have academic or behavioral problems in school. I remembered we only had one parent-teacher meeting for each semester from grades one to six. There was no such meeting from grades 7 to 12. My parents never attended any meeting because the time always conflicted with their working schedule. Moreover, my father would say it was not important to go to the meeting if I was doing well in school. I had never felt left out since most parents would not show up.

I have worked as a tutor during my college years. Working as a tutor has become the most popular job for college students in Taiwan because the national entrance examinations for high school and college have became more difficult and more competitive each year. Many parents would hire tutors to help with their children's study or send their children to "cram school" where they relearn academic subjects or learn advanced curriculum. From my experiences of working with these students ranging from grades three to 11 and their parents, they often told me directly and clearly what they wanted from me for their children's education. It was an interesting situation since they were telling me

what to do and counting on me for their children's education instead of school teachers. From my observations and conversations with them, there were two tentative reasons explaining this situation. One reason was that I was a tutor not a "teacher". Therefore, I was not so threatening to them. They could tell me what to do and they did not have to worry about any negative impact on their children's learning since they could find another tutor at any time. Second, they thought they were paying me to provide education for their children. As a result, they could request what they thought would be good for their children's education.

When I came to the U.S. in 1994, I was shocked and uncomfortable when I learned that not only parents but also students could express what they wanted to learn in class. Students were encouraged to defend their positions and disagree with or even confront other students and instructor's ideas. Being an international student experiencing extremely different schooling backgrounds, challenges resulting from cultural differences sometimes are even harder to conquer than language barriers for me. I often wonder how immigrants, particularly for recent immigrants, struggle with maintaining their own cultures and accommodate themselves into the U.S. mainstream culture simultaneously, and what their experiences of interaction with schools are when their own schooling experiences are so different from here.

I worked with a child with mild autism for about one and half years while I was working on my masters' degree at Georgia State University. The father, who speaks fluent English and Korean, emigrated with his family from Korea to America when he was three. The mother only had been in the U.S. for six years since she married him during his trip to Korea. The elder daughter was a first grader at that time. The younger daughter was the one with autism and she stayed home to receive behavioral analysis therapy, which the family had to seek and pay for themselves.

The mother and I have become close friends over these years. She told me that she never felt comfortable going to parent-teacher meetings by herself since she spoke limited English and she was not used to playing an active role in school. Furthermore, she was not familiar with American school systems since she never attended school in the U.S. From my understanding, both she and her husband attended parent-teacher meetings even though they were not as active and direct as other parents. They often checked and helped with their first child's homework, and assigned extra homework for elementary school and Korean language school. They also provided emotional support and read to both daughters them during my stay at their house.

All family members including grandparents, uncle, and aunt, were highly involved in their children's education, particularly for the one with autism.

Through networking, they found out that behavior modification had some positive effects on children with autism. They were determined to find trainers from an agency in the state of California and hire and train people to work with their exceptional child even though they could not get any financial support from the state and federal governments. I understood and empathized with their frustration since they did not know how to help their child with autism and where to get help because of limited understanding of the disability and finite knowledge of available resources. Consequently, I become much more interested in working with families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds.

I taught American-born Taiwanese and Asians or bicultural children of Chinese ethnicity at the Austin Chinese School during 1998-2000. At the beginning of my teaching work, several parents had approached me and suggested me how and what to teach in class, and how to manage certain students' misbehaviors. Ten out of 13 families came to the first parent-teacher meeting. Only four to six parents came for the following semester, however, it is clear to me they are playing fairly active and direct role in their children's Chinese education. It interests me in studying and exploring how these Taiwanese parents perceive their roles in their children's education both in American and Chinese schools.

As a second generation of Chinese immigrants from China, I often feel I have to fulfill my parents' expectations to excel in academic achievements which will lead to upward social mobility. Sometimes, I feel there are some commonality shared by my parents and the first generation of Chinese American parents. Both of them expected their children to achieve well in academics and to work in high-status job such as physicians. However, when Chinese American parents have a child displaying learning difficulties or behavioral problems, it must be hard for them to accept the fact that their child is not achieving and might have a disability.

Looking back over my entire schooling process, I realize that my parents had their own patterns of involvement in my education, which is very different from parents' in the U.S. mainstream culture. In the American educational system, parental involvement usually includes parents to serve as volunteers in school, to visit classrooms, to help with curriculum design and bulletin board decoration, to attend parent-teacher meetings, to take decision-making roles in parent-teacher associations, advisory councils, or other committees, and to advocate for students. While parental involvement is perceived as active and direct school participation in the U.S. mainstream cultural context, alternative patterns of family involvement of parents from CLD backgrounds are often misinterpreted by American educators as lack of concern. Instead of imposing

U.S. mainstream ways of parental involvement on these CLD families, educators should acknowledge that these immigrants, particularly for recent Asian immigrants, often have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds from the U.S. I am interested in addressing the intercultural communication and interactions between Asian American parents, specifically Chinese American parents of exceptional students and teachers.

I expect to find out that Chinese American families' unfamiliarity with the disability in terms of characteristics, behavior management, and intervention strategies will not only complicate the communication process with teachers but also restrict their roles as decision-makers and advocates for their children's SED. Teachers might have limited training in developing cultural sensitivity to collaborate with Chinese American parents. Instead, they might focus on educating exceptional children rather than working work parents. Furthermore, they might be unable to distinguish parents' quietness as being in agreement or in disagreement.

I will be very discouraged and sad to find out that these parents have negative experiences with school educators who do not appreciate diverse cultures, are very reluctant to listen to them, and even hold negative perceptions of their parenting behaviors. These implicit negative perceptions of the other parties might not only influence the collaborative relationships among them but

also deprive the available meaningful learning opportunities for the exceptional student. Hopefully, my research findings can add to our understanding of Chinese American families of exceptional students, help educators to take family's cultures and languages into consideration when working with them, and serve as cornerstone to develop communication guidelines to work with them.

At this point in time, naturalistic inquiry seems to be an appropriate strategy for me to explore the intercultural interactions between Chinese American parents of exceptional students and teachers who are involved in the SED services.

Appendix B: Consent Form for Chinese American Families

Dear Parent,

You are invited to participate in a study to enhance knowledge and understanding of the communication and interactions between schoolteachers and Chinese American families of students. My name is Hsiu-Chen Lin and I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, in the Special Education Department. This study is conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy in special education. I hope to learn from Chinese American families what challenges and successes they experienced during their communication with teachers who might not necessarily share the same ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds as yours.

You are selected as one of four possible participating families in this study because you are the first generation of Chinese American and you have a child receiving special education services at school. If you decide to participate, I will interview you at least four times during the study time. I expect to finish all data collection in the spring semester. However, it might extend to June if necessary. Each interview will probably last one hour. The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed by me. You will be asked to: (a) keep any notice or document sent to and from school; and (b) allow me to be present and videotape your interactions with teachers (e.g., parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings).

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you and your child will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms rather than actual names. All study data and tapes will be kept in a secure locked cabinet. I will be the only person who has access to these data. There is no risk expected for this study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with The University of Texas at Austin, the _____ (Name) School, or the Star Independent School District. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time by notifying me.

I am willing to answer any questions you might have regarding this study now or at a later date. You can contact me by e-mail at hclin@mail.utexas.edu, call me at (512) 576-6285 or (512) 472-5621, or write to the University of Texas at Austin, SZB 306, Department of Special Education, Austin, TX 78712. You can also

contact my supervising professor, Shernaz Garcia, Ph.D. by e-mail at garcias@mail.utexas.edu, call her at (512) 471-6244, or write to the University of Texas at Austin, SZB 306, Department of Special Education, Austin, TX 78712.
You may keep a copy of this form.
Thank you for your help.

_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Researcher	Date

Appendix C: Consent form for Parents-Chinese Version

參與研究同意書 - 家長版

親愛的家長，您好：

我的名字是林秀珍，目前就讀於德州大學特殊教育研究所。我想邀請您參與我的博士論文研究。這個研究的目的是希望能瞭解並增進老師與家長之間的溝通與互動，尤其是針對家裡有子女在學校接受特殊教育的家長。華人子弟在學校，常常面對非亞裔的老師，因此身為家長的您也常必須與非亞裔的老師互動。我們都知道不同文化背景是造成溝通障礙的最主要因素。因此我很希望能藉由我的研究計劃，學習並瞭解家長在與老師溝通互動時曾經歷過的成功與挫折的例子。

因為你有子女在學校接受特殊教育，並且您是華人第一代移民，所以您被選為四戶可能參與研究的家庭之一。如果您決定參與我的研究，我會在研究執行時間至少訪問您四次，每次大約一小時。我預期在這個學期(spring semester, 2001)完成收集資料的工作，但若有需要，研究時間可能延長至六月。其餘您需要做的事如下：（1）請您保存任何由學校送回或您送給老師的通知單或家長聯絡簿；及（2）請我出席並錄下您與老師的互動情形(如家長會議)。

為了確保我有正確的資訊，我會將訪談的過程錄音。所有的研究資料、錄影(像)帶與錄音帶將會儲存在安全並上鎖的櫃子裡，我會是唯一可以翻閱研究資料或傾聽錄音帶的人。任何收集的資料都會被保密，在沒有您允許的狀況下，絕對不會洩漏出去。為確保隱秘性與隱私權，所有的真名都會用假名取代，包括學校名稱、學生姓名和您的名字等。這個研究並沒有危險性。您是

否參與這項研究的決定，並不會影響您未來與德州大學奧斯汀校區，_____ (名字)學校，和Star學區的關係。如果您決定參與這項研究，您可以在任何時候通知我您決定退出研究。

我很樂意為您解答您對這項研究的任何疑問。你可以用以下的三種方式與我聯絡：（1）電子信箱 hclin@mail.utexas.edu，（2）電話572-6285或472-5621，或（3）寫信至 The University of Texas at Austin, SZB306, Department of Special Education, Austin, TX 78712。您也可以與我的指導教授, Shernaz Garcia, Ph.D. 聯絡：（1）電子信箱 garcias@mail.utexas.edu，（2）電話 471-6244，或（3）寫信至 The University of Texas at Austin, SZB306, Department of Special Education, Austin, TX 78712.

您可以擁有這份參與研究同意書。
謝謝您的協助，讓我們提供更好的教育品質給您的子女。

_____ _____

研究參與者簽名 日期

_____ _____

研究者簽名 日期

Appendix D: Consent Form for Teacher

Perspectives on Communication with Chinese American Families

Dear Teacher,

You are invited to participate in a study to enhance knowledge and understanding of the communication and interactions between schoolteachers and Chinese American families of students. My name is Hsiu-Chen Lin and I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, in the Special Education Department. This study is conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy in special education. I hope to learn from teachers what challenges and successes they experienced during their communication with Chinese American families who might not necessarily share the same ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds yours.

You are selected as one of four possible informants in this study because you are a teacher of Chinese American student(s) who is(are) receiving special education services at your school, and you were born and raised in the United States. If you decide to participate, I will interview you at least four times during the study time. I expect to finish all data collection in the spring semester. However, it might extend to June if necessary. Each interview will probably last one hour. The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed by me. You will be asked to: (a) keep any notice or document sent home and receive from parents; and (b) allow me to be present and videotape your interactions with parents (e.g., parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings).

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms rather than actual names. All study data and tapes will be kept in a secure locked cabinet. I will be the only person who has access to these data. There is no risk expected for this study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with The University of Texas at Austin, the _____ (name) School, and the Star Independent School District. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time by notifying me.

I am willing to answer any questions you have regarding this study now or at a later date. You can contact me by e-mail at hclin@mail.utexas.edu, call me at

(512) 576-6285or (512) 472-5621, or write to the University of Texas at Austin, SZB306, Department of Special Education, Austin, TX 78712. You can also contact my supervising professor, Shernaz Garcia, Ph.D. by e-mail at garcias@mail.utexase.edu, call her at (512) 471-6244, or write to the University of Texas at Austin, SZB 306, Department of Special Education, Austin, TX 78712.

You may keep a copy of this form.

Thank you for your help.

_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Investigator	Date

Appendix E: An Interview Guide for Chinese Family Participants

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of this interview is to understand some of your experiences in interacting with the primary teacher of your child. Furthermore, I would like to know your thoughts and ideas on what makes a successful parent-teacher communication. Your help is very important to my understanding of your communication with schools. If you don't have any question, I would like to know something about you first.

Background Information

1. Please tell me about yourself and your family.
   Probing questions:
   a. Where are you from originally?
   b. Please tell me when and why you came to the U.S.
   c. Who are living with you now?
   d. How long have you been in the U.S. and Texas? And your families?
   e. Where did you receive your education?

2. What languages are spoken in your household?
   Probing questions:
   a. Languages spoken between you and other adult families.
   b. Languages spoken between you and your child/children.
   c. What languages are used to communicate with the identified child?

3. Where did your child attend school? What grade and class?
   Probing questions:
   a. How did s/he start to attend that class?
   b. What kind of education or services did s/he receive there?
   c. Who and how did the personnel (e.g., school diagnosticians or teachers) tell you that your child need to go to that class?
   d. How did the school professionals describe your child?
   e. How will you describe your child? (e.g., academics, social performance, personality)
   f. When and how did you find your child is different from others' children?
   g. What label has given to your child in order to receive (special) education in that class?

h. How did you feel about the label for your child?
i. What do you see as the possible explanations for your child's disability?
j. How will you explain your child's differences?

Parental Expectation

1. What are your expectations or goals for your child?
Probing questions:
a. Educational/academic areas.
b. Social/emotional development.
c. Career expectation.
d. How did you plan to accomplish these goals?
e. What happened?

2. How did you communicate these goals with teacher?
Probing questions:
a. How? (e.g., written, fact-to-face, over the phone)
b. What situation? (e.g., parent-teacher conference, IEP meeting, etc.)
c. What happened?

3. What are your expectations of yourself as a parent?
Probing questions:
a. Parental roles and responsibilities.
b. How did you accomplish these expectations?

4. What are your expectations of teacher and school?
Probing questions:
a. Teacher's roles and responsibilities.
b. School's roles and responsibilities.
c. What services are needed for your child?
d. How services are provided to your child?
e. What do you hope they can do?

School Contact Information

1. How long has your child attending Ms./Mr. _____ class?
2. How often is your interaction with the teacher?
3. Under what situations have you contacted the teacher? How? (written, fact-to-face, over the phone) How long did it last? What happened?
4. Under what situations have the teacher contacted you? How? (written, fact-to face, over the phone) How long did it last? What happened?

Experiences and Perspectives of Communication with Teachers

1. Generally speaking, how would you describe your communication and interaction with your child's teacher?
2. What has communication been like with your child's teachers in parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings?

Successful Experiences

1. Tell me the best story/experience of your interaction with the teacher.

   Probing questions:
   a. What made this experience as the best one?
   b. What makes it successful?
   c. What did the teacher do to help you understand him/her better?
   d. What did you do to help the teacher understand you better?

2. During your participation in your child's special education, what are the successes?
3. What makes effective parent-teacher communication?

Unsuccessful experiences

1. Tell me the worst/embarrassed story/experience of your interaction with the teacher.

   Probing questions:
   a. What made this experience as the worst one?
   b. What makes it unsuccessful?
   c. What happened later?
   d. How did you finish the meeting?

2.During your participation in your child's special education, what are the challenges?
3.What makes failed/negative parent-teacher communication?

Appendix F: An Interview Guide for Teacher Participant

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of this interview is to understand some of your experiences in interacting with the families of this exceptional Chinese American student (name). Furthermore, I want to understand your thoughts and ideas on what makes a successful parent-teacher communication. Your help is very important to my understanding of your communication with Chinese American families. If you don't have any question, I would like to know something about you first.

Background Information

1. Please tell me about yourself.
   Probing questions:
   a. Where are you from originally?
   b. Were you born and raised in the U.S.?
   c. Where did you receive your education?
   d. What languages do you speak?
   e. Tell me about your training and experiences in special education, bilingual education, teaching English as a second language, and multicultural issues.
   f. How long have you been teaching?

2. Tell me about the class you are teaching.
   Probing questions:
   a. What class are you teaching?
   b. How long have you been teaching this class?

3. How did this student start coming to your class?
   Probing questions:
   a. How long have you been teaching this student?
   b. What kind of education or services did s/he receive here?
   c. What languages are used to communicate with the identified student?
   d. What label is given to this student?
   e. How did this student get the label?
   f. How will you describe this student? (e.g., academics, social performance, personality)
   g. How will you explain these differences?

4. Tell me your understandings of this student and his/her family's linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
5. How many Asian/Chinese American students have you taught?
6. Do you speak any Asian/Chinese language?

Teacher's Expectation

1. What are your expectations or goals for this student?
   Probing questions:
   a. Educational/academic areas.
   b. Social/emotional development.
   c. Career expectation.
   d. How did you plan to accomplish these goals?
   e. What happened?

2. How did you communicate these goals with student's families?
   Probing questions:
   a. How? (e.g., written, fact-to-face, over the phone)
   b. What situation? (e.g., parent-teacher conference, IEP meeting, etc.)
   c. What happened?

3. What are your expectations of yourself as a teacher?
   Probing questions:
   a. Teacher's roles and responsibilities.
   b. How did you accomplish these expectations?

4. What are your expectations of parents?
   Probing questions:
   a. Parents' roles and responsibilities.
   b. What do you hope the parents can do?

Family Contact Information

1. How often is your interaction with the family?
2. Under what situations have you contacted the student's family? How? (written, fact-to-face, over the phone) How long did it last? What happened?
3. Under what situations have the student's family contacted you? How? (written, fact-to-face, over the phone) How long did it last? What happened?

Experiences and Perspectives of Communication with Families

1. Generally speaking, how would you describe your communication and interaction with this student's families?
2. What has communication been like with parents in parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings?

Successful Experiences

1. Tell me the best story/experience of your interaction with the student's families.
   Probing questions:
   a. What made this experience as the best one?
   b. What makes it successful?
   c. What did the parent do to help you understand him/her better?
   d. What did you do to help the parent understand you better?

2. During your collaboration with parents, what are the successes?
3. What makes effective parent-teacher communication?

Unsuccessful experiences

1. Tell me the worst/embarrassed story/experience of your interaction with the student's families.

   Probing questions:
   a. What made this experience as the worst one?
   b. What makes it unsuccessful?
   c. What happened later?
   d. How did you finish the meeting?

2. During your collaboration with parents, what are the challenges?
3. What makes failed/negative parent-teacher communication?

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VITA

Hsiu-Chen Lin was born in Changhua city, Taiwan on October 1, 1969, the daughter of Peng Lin and Mu-Dan Tsai. She graduated from Chung-Hsin High School in Nantou, Taiwan. She received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology from Kaohsiung Medical College (currently Kaohsiung Medical University) in Kaohsiung in June of 1992. During the following two years, she was employed as a research assistant in the Department of Psychiatry, National Cheng Kung University Hospital. In 1994, she attended Georgia State University, Georgia and was awarded a Master of Science Degree in Counseling with concentration in community counseling in August of 1996. She began a doctoral program at the University of Texas at Austin in August of 1997. She was a teaching assistant at the department of special education and supervised student teachers in general and special education classrooms. She will join the faculty of the Educational Program at Taichung Healthcare and Management University, Taiwan, after graduation.

Permanent address: No 65 Jen Ai Road, Chung-Hsin New Village,
Nantou City, Taiwan 540

This dissertation was typed by the author.